

**University of Chester**

**An inquiry into adult adoptees' journeying with their  
sexuality**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Chester  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselling Studies  
within the Department of Social and Political Science**

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## Declaration

*“The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.”*

Signed:

Date:

## **DEDICATION**

**This Thesis is dedicated to my mum, Christine Sims; she never lived to read this thesis, and she'll never fully understand her contribution to it, but mum lives on within it.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

**I am grateful for the support and guidance of my two research supervisors, Professor Peter Gubi and Professor William West, for their constant belief and unerring kindness.**

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# Abstract

## An inquiry into adult adoptees' journeying with their sexuality

Michael Carl Sims

This multi-layered and multi-perspective inquiry focuses on adult adoptees' sense-making of, and presentation of, their sexuality and self/identity. It is situated firmly within postmodern and social constructionist traditions, whereby both the personal/particular and social/shared dimensions of experiences are negotiated, disenfranchised/marginalised voices are privileged, and the distinctions between, research, art and therapy are disrupted. Due to the adoptees being placed in, and conceived as, marginalised group members, their local and marginalised voices are privileged within this thesis.

The aims of this research were:

- ❖ To gain access to, and gather, adult adoptee's personal narratives/stories around the subject of their sexuality, their sexual identity and their adoption;
- ❖ To give 'voice' to adult adoptees around the subject of sexuality and adoption;
- ❖ To represent, and then present, these narratives/stories, honouring both the individual particulars of 'lived experience' and also to highlight any shared thematic qualities of the participants.

A bricolage approach was used, using Kinchloe and Berry's (2004) formalised theoretical concept of the 'POET' (the point of entry text). To capture the multiplicity of the research, and the POETs, a three-phase approach was applied. Phase one incorporated my auto-ethnographic account, of my lived experience of sexuality as an adoptee, through an analysis of my narratives and poems. Phase two explored the participants' understanding, and presentation of, their sexuality from the analysis of their interview data. These data were analysed through a heuristic approach, developing individual depictions, a group depiction and then a final creative synthesis. In phase three, an interpretative phenomenological analysis, was applied to highlight thematic individual and shared themes of the participants' data, to present a more structured and thematic representation. The data from phase one, two and three, highlighted the vulnerability, and cultural socio-political constructs, that can affect the self-formation and sexuality of an adoptee. The data from phase three established four superordinate themes: 1. Sexual attitudes, 2. Vulnerability, 3. The 'Other', and 4. The Feminine. The research demonstrates that adult adoptees, as vulnerable, are more open and susceptible to external influence regarding their sexuality and self-formation, and proposes an '*inherent potential toward vulnerability*' within the adoptee. Therefore, there is a relationship between the adoptee, as inherently vulnerable, and how they constitute their sexuality and self-formation. Implications for practice require careful ethical consideration of the adoptees' inherent vulnerability and how this impacts their sexuality and self-formation. These considerations for good practice/therapeutic intervention are underpinned by an awareness of potential ethical, political and social issues regarding the adoptee's susceptible influence by the 'other'. Therefore, an awareness of how 'non-directive practice' can be integrated ethically by the practitioner is emphasised. These implications are not always evident in counselling/psychotherapy training and supervision, and therefore need careful consideration by the practitioner at a personal level, and in relation to social policy, when working with adoptees.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Research Context

*Sex. Almost everyone does it, but almost no one wants to talk about. It is quite the paradox when you consider how vital sex is to human life. Not only is it the act that propels our species forward, but it is also a way to bond with a romantic partner, a way to relieve the stress of daily life, not to mention an enjoyable way to pass the time. Of course, sex is not fun and games all of the time. For some people, sex can be a constant source of anxiety and insecurity, an awkward and embarrassing topic of discussion, not to mention a potential pathway to disease and death. Sex thus has both a light side and a dark side, and each deserves to be acknowledged. (Lehmiller, 2014, p. xii)*

If we take Lehmiller's above quote, we see that the act of 'sex', intrinsically embedded within the subject of 'human sexuality', is a topic that spans the myriad avenues of human existence relating to subcategories that interweave and exist within the topic of human sexuality per se. Procreation, romance, love, leisure, pain, death, disease, physical, psychological and emotional pleasures and distresses are offered; the subject of sexuality then encompasses the very heart of human existential experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968; Satre, 1948; Spinelli, 2005, 2014, 2015; Wrathall & Murphy, 2013; Yalom, 1980).

To contextualise the subject of sexuality and my research, I chose to study the subject of sexuality from within a specific community - a community I consider myself to belong to - 'my community'. When stating 'my community,' I am in effect referring to an 'adoption community'. It's a collective of individuals who share commonality of experience; in this case being adult adoptees.

The two main reasons for this contextualisation are that firstly within the adoption literature, sexuality as a subject is sparsely researched, there are only two studies, (i.e., Greenberg, 1993; Greenberg & Littlewood, 1995) that focus on adoptees' sexuality. The other

literature gives no more than a few paragraphs to the subject, let alone a chapter in its own right (e.g. Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Javier et al., 2007; Lifton, 1979, 2009; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009; Harris, 2012). When it is mentioned, it is lightly touched on referring to either adolescent sexual development or is pathologized referring to inappropriate sexual behaviour - the 'incest taboo' (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Javier et al., 2007; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009). Verrier (2009) clearly states:

*No matter how much the adoptee pleads with the mother/father...sexual relations between parent-figures and children, regardless of age, should never happen (p. 140).*

This has also been recognised in the social community as 'Genetic Sexual Attraction (GSA)' (Eleftheriou-Smith, 2014; Greenberg, 1993; Greenberg & Littlewood, 1995; GSA, 2012; Kirsta, 2003). GSA-forums (2012) define it as:

*[I]ntense sexual desire that can arise between genetically related people who are united in Adulthood, after having been denied the opportunity to form proper emotional bonds. (p.1)*

Barbara Gonyo 'created' the phrase Genetic Sexual Attraction back in the 1980's after being reunited with her adopted son and experiencing these intense sexual feelings for him, and him for her (Eleftheriou-Smith, 2014; GSA-forums, 2012). Although this has not been exclusively attributed solely to adoption reunion, it does also occur as phenomena outside the adoption triad<sup>1</sup> (Eleftheriou-Smith, 2014, Kirsta, 2003).

Another factor referring to the adoption literature is that it is predominately from the USA, with only three pieces of research being from the UK. The most current in the UK is Harris's (2012) book, 'Chosen', which gives narrative accounts of UK adult adoptees, but only two narrative accounts mention sexuality 'in passing' with no focus or significance to it as a topic. Greenberg (1993) and Greenberg & Littlewood's (1995) research, also from the UK,

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<sup>1</sup> The adoption Triad consists of adoptee, adoptive parents and birth parents (see Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009)

does focus on an aspect of sexuality within the field of adoption. However, it is exclusively again through the lens of Genetic Sexual Attraction.

The second reason for this contextualisation is my belonging to the adoption community, and from a researcher perspective this gives me ‘insider researcher’ status, that Glynn (2015) claims as, *‘those who choose to study a group to which they belong’* (p.32). From this position, the researcher:

*views the research process and products as ‘co-constructions’ between the researcher and the participants...[regarding] the participants as active ‘informants’ to the research, and attempts to give ‘voice’ to the informants within the research domain* (Glynn, 2015, p.32).

This Ph.D. study is a contribution to the subject area of adoption sexuality through the voices of adult adoptees. Through this research, I have offered narratives and findings to help others understand and comprehend sexuality from the perspective of adoption, and to add to the continuation of knowledge in this somewhat sparsely researched arena. From a psychotherapeutic viewpoint, I hope this research will widen the knowledge base for those that therapeutically work with adoptees, and help to inform them around this subject. The intention of this Ph.D. thesis is to take the exploration of sexuality within the field of adoption one step further. Again, this has implications for both the practice and training of counsellors and psychotherapists, and other health care professionals that work within adoption; creating and promoting awareness of adoptees’ sexuality.

## **1.2 Research originality**

The originality of this piece of research is constituted through a series of factors. The first is that it researches adult adoptees’ experiences and understandings of their sexuality, which the current research on adoption (see **Chapter 2**) does not cover.

The second factor gives voice to adult adoptees, experiences around the subject of sexuality. There are narrative accounts (Campbell, Silverman & Patti, 1991; Grant, 2009; Harris, 2012; Moran, 1994; Moroz, 1996) of adoptees voicing the subject of adoption, but these are based more in the process of adoption per se, touching on subjects of existentialism, loss, grieving, reunion and trauma. This research looks at sexuality.

The third factor is a demographic and cultural point referring to research based within the UK. I'm focusing on adult adoptees within the UK, so this will add to this under researched subject area on the whole, but especially with a contextual focus on UK adult residents.

The final factor is evident in the way this subject has been researched, the methodology that has been applied, and the way that the thesis has been created (see **Chapter 3**).

### **1.3 Positioning the Researcher**

*[R]esearcher reflexivity [is] the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry. If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and write our representations of the work, then perhaps we can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research. (Etherington, 2004, p.31)*

According to Etherington, all reputable qualitative research requires the researcher to share their personal history and disclose the cultural, social and psychological aspects that make the researcher the individual person that they are (fixed or changing). To meet this requirement, and to give an insight into the researcher (me), I will now disclose my personal

links to the research, aspects of the person I consider myself to be, and the influences that have shaped me.

My relationship to this research started from my own sexual development as a young person. Early from a young age, I found myself attracted to people for many different reasons: looks, fun factor, nurturing, caring, intelligent, supportive, educational and loving. What I found was that my attraction wasn't always to the cultural standards of my social group. I found that as I became sexually active in my early teens, I was finding both genders (male and female) sexually attractive, and not always for the same reasons. This caused a great deal of confusion and isolation regarding my identity and sexual 'sense of self'. Was I gay, straight, bi-sexual? I could never satisfyingly pin it down. This, on later reflection, was helped to be answered through understanding the/my cultural beliefs and values that prevailed as I was growing up and the influence of these (see **Chapter 4**) in my psychological and social development.

However, this initial confusion, with the added experience of being adopted, led to a very confusing, difficult and, at times, painful periods of my life; and still can affect me now emotionally and psychologically when I feel vulnerable. Living with this confusion of self and identity had been with me since my early years and has only, in the last 10 years, begun to resolve itself (with me finding a deeper acceptance of self and sexual identity). Over the years, I have experienced sexual and loving relationships with people from both genders (although there was always a deep fear of not being socially accepted and ostracised when in same-sex relationships from the heterosexual majority).

These developmental experiences eventually guided me into the helping professions, with me finally qualifying as a 'person-centred therapist' (Rogers, 1951, 1957, 1959, 1980), which also has taken me into counsellor/psychotherapy training and lecturing. Rogers' theories 'fit me' and made perfect sense to me as I was learning them and studying them, giving me a foundational starting point to then delve further into 'existential thinking'

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968; Satre, 1948; Spinelli, 2005, 2014, 2015; Wrathall & Murphy, 2013; Yalom, 1980), and then finally into ‘social constructionism’ (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009, 2011; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Lock & Strong, 2010), and ‘postmodern thought’ (Butler, 1992; Derrida, 1978, 1981; Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1984; Gergen, 2009; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Lyotard, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1992; Ramey & Grubb, 2009; Rosenau, 1992; Sims, 2015).

I would say that I am not an adherent to any particular fundamental of the above theoretical ideas of human living, experience and existence. I see myself as applying the aspects of theory and knowledge that ‘fit’ with my own personal understanding of human existence. The closest alliance I have would be to Kenneth Gergen’s ‘relational being’ (2011) and to Enersto Spinelli’s ‘existentialism’ (2014, 2015). Both have a fundamental premise that the human existence and reality are based within a ‘relational certainty’. This also fits, from a therapeutic perspective and psychological developmental standpoint, with the person-centred approach’s implicit relational basis, and the therapeutic qualities that are created.

Spinelli (2015) and Gergen (2011) have both argued that ‘humanistic theories’ run counter to existentialism and social constructionism, especially Rogers’ optimistic view of the human being. This poses the question: can a person hold in tension and exist with so called ‘contradictory beliefs and values’ that run counter? For me the answer is yes. I do not see myself as a fundamentalist in any way shape or form, which attracted me to postmodern thought (although it could be argued that the contradictions and tensions are fundamental to postmodernism). The postmodern concept allows me to hold my beliefs and values in relationship to each other, whilst being context dependent with an authenticity to each relationship and social context I experience. Authentic ‘being’ or relationships are then forever fluid and changing, allowing for a complexity of living and relational dynamic dependent on the human encounter with the other or self.

This is also reflected in my sense of identity and sexuality. I have been happily married to a woman for 10 years and I have three children in their early years. I enjoy being a husband

and father in this social context, as it provides a socially comforting blanket to the social world that I live in. Relating this to my sexuality, I consider my sexual attraction to be dependent on the person I encounter, and view sexuality as a process of personal expression, identity, engagement with the other, and sense of self. I don't believe I have any definitive sexual orientation or sexual identity. I consider these to be social constructs that categorise a person's actions, behaviours, identity and sense of self, to help societal members 'pigeon-hole' individuals for easier stereotypical predictable understanding, which sadly reduces individuality and uniqueness to generalised stereotypes to appease the possible fear and angst of authentic encounter. The closest category/label that could represent me (in a somewhat paradoxical way) is 'pomosexual', which Queen & Schimel (cited in Elizabeth, 2013) define as, '*The queer erotic reality beyond the boundaries of gender, separatism, and essentialist notions of sexual orientation*'. However, again, the very notion of a label, for me, is to help understanding for the other in encounter, and not necessarily to give reason, understanding and identity to my feelings, attractions and 'sense of self'. I am aware that for others, labels and social categories can be helpful and useful to give meaning to experiences, and understanding to behaviours and feelings, which is evident in the findings of my research and some of the participants' viewpoints (See **Chapter 5**).

This reflexive introductory account, I hope, has given the reader some insights into the researcher, my beliefs, my values, and my motivations. A final aspect, which ties in with my need to be useful and helpful, are my political leanings. These are sympathetic and activist toward emancipatory practice and action, to assist those in society that are marginalised, disenfranchised and discriminated against due to hegemonic oppression and majority authoritarian rule. Growing up, I experienced a great deal of bullying, oppression, and negative reactions due to my sexuality, beliefs, and values that I held at those times. For me, those experiences were painful, scary, lonely and depressing; if this research (in some small way) has helped, or can help, another human being find some understanding to their



experiences of adoption and their sexuality, or give possible knowledge and insight to someone who knows or works with a person who may have been challenged by these areas in their life, then I know this research has been a worthwhile endeavour.

## 1.4 Research question & Aims

The research question that underpins this thesis is: *How do adult adoptees make sense of, and present, their sexuality and self/identity?*

The aims of this research are:

- ❖ To gain access to, and gather, adult adoptee's personal narratives/stories around the subject of their sexuality, their sexual identity and their adoption;
- ❖ To give 'voice' to adult adoptees around the subject of sexuality and adoption;
- ❖ To represent, and then present, these narratives/stories, honouring both the individual particulars of 'lived experience' and also to highlight any shared thematic qualities of the participants.

The methodology for this research was established in relation to these research aims and is based within a 'relativist social constructionist philosophy' (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009, 2011; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Lock & Strong, 2010), embracing a 'postmodern perspective' (Derrida, 1978, 1981; Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1984; Gergen, 2009; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Lyotard, 1984; Ramey & Grubb, 2009; Rosenau, 1992; Sims, 2015). Therefore, qualitative methods were used to gather data for the representation of 'individual lived experience' (Moustakas, 1990), and also for the coalescing of this idiosyncratic knowledge into shared thematic general knowledge (Finlay, 2009; Smith, & Osborn, 2003; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

These qualitative methods have been integrated into using and adopting Kinchloe and Berry's (2004) 'Bricolage methodology', which uses multi-methods, theory, ideology, sociology and psychology, as POETs (points of entry text). These POETs allow, the bricoleur researcher, different perspectival entry points into the research, allowing a pluralistic, multi-

perspectival viewpoint of the research subject, the participants, and data. As I argued in Sims (2015), '*multi-viewpoints as opposed to mono-viewpoints, the bricolage offers a philosophical stance founded in difference and diversity.*' (p.80) Kinchloe and Berry's (2004) bricolage methodology, aligns and 'fits' with my researcher positioning as a 'relational therapist', where I embrace 'pluralism and diversity' (Cooper & McLeod, 2011) within human encounter and therapeutic practice.

## **1.5 Thesis parameters**

The subject of sexuality is a 'broad stroke' across the academy, leading into areas of sexual practice, conduct, and performance (Freud, 1920; Kimmel & Plante, 2004; Milton, 2014; Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948, 1953; Lehmiller, 2014; Le Vay & Baldwin, 2014), and sexual identity and orientation (Crooks & Baur, 2016; Elizabeth, 2014; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers, 2001).

It also leads into sexual ethics, politics and diversity, to name a few (Brady, 2008; Brunetti et al., 2008; Chu & Bowman, 2002; Clarke et al., 2010; Crabtree, 2009; Crooks & Baur, 2016; Drescher, 2002; Foucault, 1976, 1984, 1990; Garbacik, 2013; Le Vay & Baldwin, 2012; Norton, 2008; Stein, 2011; Pearce, 2011; Plummer, 1981, 1996a, 2000, 2015; Priebe & Svedin, 2013; Rahman & Jackson, 2010; Risman, 2004; Spinelli, 2014). Therefore 'Sexuality' in its own right is an exhaustive and expansive subject.

If we then move into the subject of gender which is intrinsically linked to the subject of sexuality (for an introduction see Butler, 1990, 1992, Garbacik, 2013; Rahman & Jackson, 2010; Richardson & Robinson, 2007; Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers, 2001) the 'broad stroke' becomes somewhat even broader and moves into areas beyond the parameters of this research study.

To focus the thesis and apply a framework to structure the thesis; it was decided that the subject of sexuality was placed within the context of adult adoptee's self-formation and

sexuality. Therefore, the research is limited to an adult adoptee's understanding and 'sense making' of their self-formation and sexuality.

This subjective focus of the adult adoptee's self-formation and sexuality would then be framed within the parameters of psychological, biological and sociological theories, and how these different perspectives account for this. This will also raise questions to psychosocial factors and socio-political systems that influence the adoptees' self-formation and sexuality, highlighting the inherent forms of oppression and discrimination that exist.

## **1.6 Thesis structure**

This thesis is constituted into a series of eight chapters that divide the thesis and its content into a readable and clearly outlined framework.

Chapter 1 has introduced the research study, its context, originality, aims, boundaries and my personal links to the research, with this final structural overview.

Chapter 2 is the literature review. This shows the relevant literature that was critically reviewed. Sexuality and adoption are initially explored in this section with a focus on their relationship, and how sexual identity is interwoven with these subjects. The nature and nurture debate within sexuality is looked at and again critically reviewed in relation to this research study. This section therefore offers an in-depth exploration into the applicable research and theories that relate to the subjects of adoption and sexuality.

Chapter 3 is where I substantiate my philosophies and methodological choices. A clear rationale is given for the study and my choice of methods used to gather the data and how it was analysed. This section is a key component in justification of the research design and how these intrinsically relate and inform the representation and voicing of the participants in this piece of research.

Chapter 4 introduces and presents my personal contribution to the research as participant. I too am an adult adoptee with a story of sexuality to tell; here in my auto-

ethnographic account I expand and give a 'snapshot' into aspects of my history, social background and political outlook in respect to the subject of sexuality.

Chapter 5 presents the participant's story created in individual depictions, and then a group representation of all the participants in the form of the composite group depiction. In this chapter we look into the interview process, the content and narratives that were collected, and the analysed findings from each individual participant. Heuristic inquiry and analysis (see **section 3.5**) was used to construct this aspect of the data. The final process of this analysis is synthesised into a final creative synthesis, presented through and including my own participation, as researcher/participant to complete Moustakas' (1990) Heuristic analysis.

Chapter 6 is the coalescing and representation of the idiographic findings from each participant into the shared thematic categories. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (see **section 3.6**) was used to analyse each participant's data, which was presented into clear categories and themes. These are presented to show the shared and diverse meanings that relate to adult adoptees' experiences of sexuality.

Chapter 7 is where I have discussed and integrated the research findings relating to current secondary research and literature. I discuss new areas that have emerged from this research, and also discuss any of the similarities with the existing literature.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, with a focus on the research limitations, originality of the research study, implications for practice, and my personal reflections and reflexivity on the research study as a whole.

## **1.7 Summary**

In chapter 1 I have highlighted the research context and originality of this research. I have positioned myself in this study, giving a detailed account of 'who' the researcher is, his reasons for undertaking this research, and his beliefs and philosophies. Finally, I have shown the research question and aims, the thesis parameters, and the structure of the thesis as a

whole. In the next chapter I will present and discuss the current literature available on the subject of adoption and sexuality.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review – Sexuality & Adoption

### 2.1 Introduction

There are differing psychosocial and biological lenses to understand the subjects of adoption and sexuality and when they are placed together, these lenses can be separate, partially co-operative, co-operative, integrated, and oppositional.

For the purposes of this literature review I have taken and critically reviewed the research on the subjects of adoption and sexuality, incorporating psychological, sociological and biological perspectives appropriate to this study. There are certain studies and theorists that particularly view these subjects from a clear unintegrated stance, for example, Brickell (2006a, 2006b), Rahman and Jackson (2010), Garbacik (2013), Gamson and Mood (2004) and Gagnon and Simon (1973) view sexuality from a purely sociological perspective; whereas Schmid (2006), Freud (1920), Lehmler (2014), and Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers (2001) present sexuality from a psychological standpoint. From the existential camp, there are Spinelli (2014), Pearce (2011), Milton (2014), Mearleu-Ponty (1962), Sears (2010) and Crabtree (2009); and finally, the essentialist<sup>2</sup> or biological viewpoint is presented by Le Vay & Baldwin (2012), Norton (2008), Medina (2014), Brunetti et al. (2008), Bagemihl (1999), Bailey & Pillard (1991), Hamer (1993, 1999) and McFadden & Pasanen (1998).

The ‘nature vs nurture’<sup>3</sup> debate or ‘essentialist vs constructionist’ debate has been an on-going subject throughout human development (see Burr, 2003; Crooks & Baur, 2016; Garbacik, 2013; Gergen, 2009, 2011; Norton, 2008; Rahman & Jackson, 2010; Sincero, 2012; Stein, 2011; Witt, 2008). This debate is still relevant in the areas of adoption and sexuality.

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<sup>2</sup> Essentialism claims that a person or group of people, for example women, has specific innate traits that are typical and necessary for their function and identity. In gender politics it is the concept that men and women behave differently and have different options in life because of *intrinsic* ‘born’ or *essential* differences. (See Norton, 2008; Stone, 2004; Stein, 2011; Witt, 2008)

<sup>3</sup> According to Sincero (2012) ‘One of the oldest arguments in the history of psychology is the [Nature vs Nurture](#) debate. Each of these sides have good points that is really hard to decide whether a person's development is predisposed in his [sic] DNA, or a majority of it is influenced by life experiences and environment.’

Questions arise as to a person's genetic influences on adoption and sexuality, and the person's relational and environmental influences in the development and constructing of a 'self/identity' from an individual perspective and a relational perspective. These factors are also attributable to the development and formation of one's sexuality and how a person's sexuality is then presented, expressed and lived, whilst taking into account the contributing factors of one's biology and one's psychosocial environment.

As previously mentioned (**see section 1.1**), there is sparse research and few studies available when the two subjects of adoption and sexuality are looked at and linked together; hence the necessity for a study (such as mine) to raise questions and explore an adoptee's understanding and 'sense making' of their self in relation to the subject of their sexuality and sexual identity. In this review, I have firstly approached the two subjects individually, defining current explanations of the two subjects and discussing them through the biological, psychological and sociological contexts. I then explore both subjects together, critically discussing and presenting research, concepts and theories around the subject of sexuality in adoption. Finally, we move into, and critically review, the literature and consider the subjects of adoption and sexuality from within the 'nature vs nurture' debate, questioning the implications for practice: politically, therapeutically and theoretically.

## **2.2 Search methods**

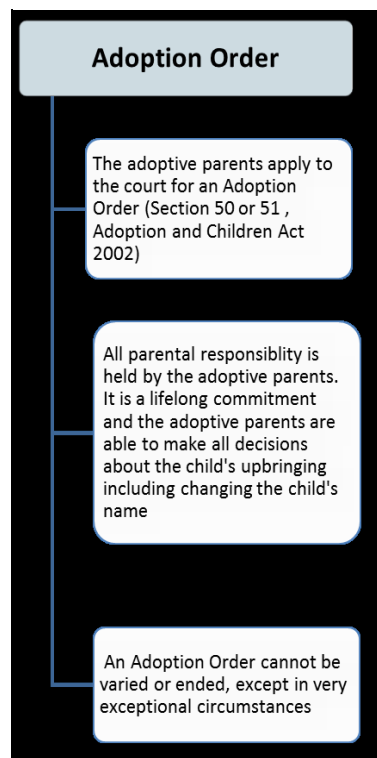
An extensive search was carried out to present and find research relevant and current for this literature review, the following electronic databases were accessed: EBSCO host, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, PubPsych, PsycArticles, Wiley Online Journal, CPR online, TherapyToday.net, Scopus, Cochrane Library, Chester University Library database, Medline, Web of Science, UCProquest, Libcat, BACP Dissertation database, and shn.org.uk.

## 2.3 Adoption

*Adoption refers to the act by which an adult formally becomes the guardian of a child and incurs the rights and responsibilities of a parent. At the conclusion of the formal process, a legal relationship between child and guardian will have formed. The legal relationship results in the adoptee becoming the legal heir of the adopter and terminates any legal rights then in existence with the natural parents.* (Legal Information Institute, 2016, p.1)

The above legal definition gives a clear and somewhat sterile definition of adoption in the Western world. Adoption is a legally binding contract between the adopters and the adoptee; if we refer to the ‘Adoption Order’ (see figure.1) we see the legal process as presented by the Adoption and Children’s Act (2002).

**Figure 1 - UK Adoption Order**



If we look to Adoption UK’s (2016) definition: ‘*Adoption is a way of providing a permanent home and family to a child who can't be brought up by their birth family*’. This gives and



posits a more emotive level of curiosity (perhaps), raising questions as to why the prospective adoptee can't be brought up by their birth family, with a need for a permanent family home.

The recent update and passing of statutory law, on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016, with the new Education and Adoption Act (2016) amending and updating section 3 of the Adoption and Children's Act (2002) posits adoption as becoming more prolific in the UK with a desperate need to find more placements for an ever-increasing number of adoptees. The Department for Education (2013a) '*Adoption reform: Children and Families Bill*' states a determined drive and wants:

*The Government...to see more children being adopted by loving families with less delay' and they also claim, 'To improve the adoption system we are implementing wide ranging reforms to: increase the number of prospective adopters; reduce unnecessary delays in the system; improve the quality and timeliness of adoption services; and expand the support available to adopters (p.9).*

With the ever-increasing numbers of children going into care and foster homes, the supply is definitely outweighing the demand. The DfE (2013a) state:

*The number of adopters does not match the number of children awaiting adoption, contributing to fewer, slower adoptions. There were around 4,600 children with placement orders who were waiting to be placed with their likely adopters on 31 March 2012. There are underlying problems in the way adopter recruitment and assessment is organised (p.9).*

These figures are rapidly increasing in England. The National Statistics relating to looked-after children in England for the year ending 31st March 2015, showed that there were 69,540 looked-after children in the UK on 31 March 2015, compared to 68,800 in 2014, with 5,330 of these looked after children being adopted during the year ending 31 March 2015, which shows an increase of 5% between 2014 and 2015 (Adoption UK, 2016).

A telling sign is a national newspaper, the Guardian (2016), which has its own section on Adoption. This national newspaper reports a troubled growing society that finds it difficult to look after their children. Sadly, this shows the ever-growing numbers of the cases of birth

families giving up their children, or their children being taken into care, and then the government response to intervene and find a loving/caring intervention to help.

If the numbers are increasing as the statistics show, what of those adoptees that are placed within the adoptive home and with the adoptive parents? Are they happy, secure, and developing as the government would want for their ever-growing citizens?

The main body of research that exists around the concept of developmental psychology and growth relating to adoption and foster care stems from the seminal work of John Bowlby and his 'attachment theory'<sup>4</sup> (1969, 1973, 1980, 2005). This has been developed by psychoanalytical theorists, e.g. Stern (1985), who shows a complexed layered aspect of self-development in a new-born infant, and also by Schore (1999) and Gerhardt (2004), who both bring in aspects of neuroscience to demonstrate the development of the child's brain. The British Association for Adoption and Fostering espouse the need for developing and understanding attachment styles with their publication '*Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption*' (Schofield & Beek, 2006), presenting a clear developmental model accessible to the 'lay person and professional' alike.

Hoopes (1990) gave a glowing report of secure attachment assisting a positive relationship, citing Singer et al. (1985) when comparing non-adoptive mother/infant couples to adoptive mother/infant couples. Hoopes (1990) states, '*there is little reason to believe their attachment relationship with their young infants will differ markedly from nonadoptive parents.*' (p.151). Grant-Marsney, Grotevant & Sayer (2015) examined the '*links between adolescents' closeness to adoptive parents (Aps) and attachment style in young adulthood*'. What they found was

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<sup>4</sup> A theory of spatial parameters exists between the child and parent. If the child feels secure and safe with the primary carer (usually, but not always the mother) then a secure attachment is established, leading the child to develop greater self-confidence within its environment. If there is an insecure attachment with the primary carer (the child feels unsafe and unsure) then the child can potentially develop fear, anxiety and a lack of self-confidence within its environment. Psychopathology in this theory is dependent on the severity of the insecure attachment e.g. if there's abuse, neglect and/or trauma. The greater the insecure attachment the greater potential for adult psychological problems i.e. depression, agoraphobia and/or personality disorders (See Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980, 2005).

a clear correlation between closeness to the adoptive parents and how the adoptee developed closeness in relationships outside the adoptive family. The results showed that a greater secure attachment with the adoptive parents created a greater '*increased closeness to Aps over time [which] was related to less avoidance and anxiety in close relationships*' (p.221). This demonstrates the positive effects of a secure attachment. However, it does raise questions as to relational and environmental factors that fostered the secure attachment 'over time', and one does question that an initial secure attachment may change to an insecure attachment with time due to social, psychological and relational factors.

A study by Zaccagnino et al. (2015) compared two groups of 9-13-year-old children; one group who had been removed from their homes and placed in institutional care, the other group a control who had never been into any care home. The results showed that the children in foster care showed a significantly higher percentage of insecure (see **footnote 3**) and disorganised attachment<sup>5</sup>. This is significant to adoption, as most children spend time in foster care before being placed into an adoptive home (Adoption UK, 2016; DfE, 2103a, 2013b, 2014).

Van London et al.'s (2007) study examined '*infant attachment and developmental functioning shortly after international adoption*' (p.1249), focusing on the infant/mother attachment style, and the adopted child's mental (MDI) and psychomotor (PDI) development. They found that adopted children's MDI and the PDI did not deviate from normative scores, and their secure-insecure attachment distribution was comparable with that of normative groups, showing a positive outcome for adoption. However, what they also found was that more adoptees were disorganized-attached (36% vs. 15% in normative groups) who had been in temporary residence in a foster home in the country of origin before adoption. This is significant, as it confirms the results of Zaccagnino et al. (2015) study which shows the

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<sup>5</sup> Disorganised attachment: Schofield & Beek (2006) state, 'Caregivers abdicate the caregiving role, representing themselves as out of control and are hostile to protect the child. The infant's drive to approach the caregiver for care and protection results in fear and increased anxiety' (p.38)

detrimental effects of interim separation from the birth mother, without a significant attachment figure to instantly take her place. What this suggests is that the likelihood of adoptees developing psychological/social issues, and/or a psychiatric 'condition' is heavily increased. This, again, questions Grant-Marsney, Grotevant & Sayer (2015) study, as according to government statistics (DfE, 2013a, 2013b, 2014), most if not all, children go to a foster home before placement, raising questions as to the possibility of developing an initial secure attachment in the current UK Adoption and Foster care system.

Attachment theory is further questioned by Barth et al. (2005), who suggest that there are limits to attachment theory as a precursor for predictive development of the child – citing Sroufe *et al.* (1999) who summarized the difficulties in using attachment theory to make predictions:

*Early experience does not cause later pathology in a linear way; yet, it has special significance due to the complex, systemic transactional nature of development. Prior history is part of current context, playing a role in selection, engagement, and interpretation of subsequent experience and in the use of available environmental supports. Finally, except in very extreme cases, early anxious attachment is not a direct cause of psychopathology but is an initiator of pathways probabilistically associated with later pathology. (p. 1)*

What Barth et al. (2005) are stating is that the:

*scientific base of attachment theory is limited both in terms of its ability to predict future behaviours, and especially with regard to its use as the underpinning theory for therapeutic intervention with children experiencing conduct problems (p.259).*

This suggests that future developing relations between the adoptee and adoptive parent/s, is not solely determined on the attachment style. However, Feeney, Passmore, & Peterson

(2007), when looking at adult adoptees, infer that the adoptee's 'internal working model'<sup>6</sup>, which is integral to attachment theory, reflects and predicts future behaviour and relating styles. This indicates a negative internal working model correlates with a negative outlook and experiencing of one's life. If this is the case, this raises questions as to the change effect of an 'internal working model', especially when engaging with psychotherapeutic intervention, and the complexity of the relational environment of the individual growing up. Can this solely be attributable to the adoptive parents? As the Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria) proverb states, '*It takes a whole village to raise a child*' (Afriprov, 2016).

This then leads us into other areas of psychosocial development, for example relational factors and environmental factors, that can either assist the adoptee's development, or direct it in less prosocial and self-harmful ways.

Verrier (2009) argued (from a psychoanalytic perspective), that separating a baby from the mother, inflicts lasting damage by disrupting prenatal bonding, which affects the baby's emerging sense of self. However, Feeney, Passmore, & Peterson, (2007) claim this '*highly contentious, and...suggest that adoption-related losses may be largely socially constructed*' (p.141). They cite Leon (2002) proposing, '*that deep-seated cultural beliefs in the values of kinship and maternal instinct cause us to view child relinquishment in terms of rejection and abandonment*' (p.141). Therefore, culturally seeing adoption as an intrinsically negative experience. This would support existing literature (**see section 2.1**) with all aspects of literature having a focus on loss and abandonment as a fundamental factor within the adoption process, with one of the initial and most influence books ever written on adoption by Lifton (1979, 2009) entitled '*Lost & Found*'.

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<sup>6</sup> Internal working model: Schofield & Beek (2006) state, 'Particular experiences in the caregiving relationship lead to the development of core sets of mental representations of self, others, and relationships, referred to by Bowlby as internal working models, which become the framework for expectations, beliefs and behaviour.' (p.21)

Below is a passage from her book relating to the idea of the adoptee being special and chosen by the adoptive parents:

*What does it mean to be chosen? This is what the adoptee must keep asking [sic] himself. It is like a Zen Koan. It is like the riddle the Sphinx put to Oedipus. Saints are chosen. And so are untouchables. To be chosen is to be acted upon – to be passive. It is not to choose. When society sets any group of people apart as chosen, or special, it both exalts and dehumanizes them. In neither case does it allow them to be like others. (Lifton, 2009, p.19)*

Lifton's quote is accurate in understanding an adoptee's life. The concept of being 'chosen' or 'special' is a recurring theme that many adoptees have been told by their adoptive parents whilst growing up and therefore the adoptee continually questions these labels over the course of their life. Harris (2012) raises four questions: If I am 'chosen', then can I be 'unchosen', if I am 'special', then can I be seen as 'ordinary'; either way leading to expectations, insecurity and vulnerability around either feeling the need to 'live up' to these ideals, or much less feeling inadequate and 'unable to live up' to these ideals; each way creating life-long issues with identity formation and self-worth (Harris, 2012; Lifton, 1979, 2007, 2009; Syne et al. 2012, Verrier, 2009). What is also significant within Lifton's quote, is her recognition of societal views and values toward the glamorising or stigmatising of an individual, and how this inadvertently 'outcasts them' 'othering' the individual and not allowing them to identify with their own social group. This confirms Harris' (2012) issues with the adoptee's self-formation and insecurity with self/identity.

Verrier (2009) sees the formation of the adoptee's self as fundamentally damaged - '*a primal wound*'. She refers to Stern's (1985) '*ideal state of the Self*' which is seen as congruent, a feeling of '*rightness, well-being, and wholeness*' which is injured after the separation from the birth mother, creating lasting damage and developmental issues with the adoptee whilst setting up a lasting journey to 'find' the Self and become whole again. This is echoed by

Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig (1992), who also see the adoptee's journey for self as a lifelong endeavour, although they use and adapt Erikson's (1950) '*psychosocial model of the life cycle*' to the process of adoption and then show how the adoptee can resolve Erikson's model from an adoptee's perspective.

Lifton (1979, 2007, 2009, 2010) takes metaphorical imagery and the notion of '*game playing*' to show the implicit cultural messages that provoke and engage the values and beliefs that the 'adoptive circle tells themselves'. Lifton's '*Adoption Game*' describes the pretending, from all members of the adoptive family including the adopted child, in the false belief that the adopted child is socio-psychologically and biologically from the adoptive parents. This in turn creates a schism, or 'double' self, in the adoptee, who then lives out two existences - the '*ghosts of the birth family*', and the adoptive family. Although this may be the case in Lifton's experience of adoption in the 1970s and 1980s, the adoption process since the 1990s shows a strong focus on intercommunication and support from all aspects of the adoption circle, creating transparent clear lines of familial history and interaction (Brodzinsky, 2011; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Campbell, Silverman & Patti, 1991; Farr, Grant-Marsney & Grotevant, 2014; Feeney, Passmore & Peterson, 2007; Fisher, 2015; Gladstone, & Westhug, 1992; Javier et al., 2007; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Osborne, Mahmood & Visser, 2015; Miles, 2003; Moran, 1994; Norgate, & Traill, 2009; Schofield & Beek, 2006).

Watkins (2005), from a political perspective, sees the adoptee and the adoption family as 'pathologized' by the existing modernist paradigm, and the adoptee has consequently been marginalised and disenfranchised through this process. She:

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<sup>7</sup> Erikson's psychosocial lifestyle model (1950): consists of eight psychosocial stages that humans encounter throughout their life from infancy to old age. By resolving the conflicting stages: Trust vs. Mistrust, Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt, Initiative vs. Guilt, Industry vs. Inferiority, Identity vs. Role Confusion, Intimacy vs. Isolation, Generativity vs. Stagnation, and Integrity vs. Despair, the individual results in a consistent and 'healthy' ego identity. (see also Cherry, 2016)

*cautions against seeing developmental challenges arising from adoption, minority status, and multi-ethnic family life as predictive of ongoing identity problems, confusing snapshots at single points in an adoptee's life with developmental outcome as a whole* (p.2).

She poses examples of how her children and she, herself, have navigated their sense of identities and challenged dominant discourse of which they have experienced through their journeys together within the social world; having to deal with racism, sexism, and exclusion due to being in the adoption triad. She raises concerns regarding 'identity confusion' and development of racialism (positive or negative) referring to Cockley's (2002) study and how this enforces cultural stereotyping and 'sameness'.

From this viewpoint, Watkins contests essentialism by planting the adoptee's identity development in a cultural context and argues for a multiracial, pluralistic society where diversity is seen as an unbounded positive and flourishing aspect to human development, social harmony and growth. She promotes dialogue whereby empathic understanding, acceptance and the space for inclusive practice is created, which makes a direct connection to Rogers (1957, 1959, 1961, 1980) theories for interpersonal relationships and social development.

Unlike Verrier (2009), Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig (1992), and Lifton (2009), Watkins doesn't see the adoptee's self-formation as intrinsically damaged. She cites Rosi Braidotti's (1994) 'nomadic subjectivity', which is the foundational premise of her arguments, whereby the 'nomadic self' is seen and experienced as "*multi-layered identities where class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and others interact with each other*" (p.12). People are then seen as interconnected, fostering and displaying our bridges to each other, to challenge and move across "*established categories and levels of experience*" (p.13), which again can be achieved through empathic dialogue. Watkins sees the 'self of the adoptee' as nomadic and in process, with the adoptee being on a constant journey of 'becoming', not dissimilar to Rogers (1961) concept.



However, interestingly, she does agree on a unified concept that is universal for all adoptees, that the abandonment and separation from the birth mother is a constant figure in an adoptee's life, and a process of mourning to be experienced and navigated through one's identity development; this corresponds to Verrier's (2009) concept of the primal wound.

Syne et al. (2012) look not only at the adoptee but also highlight the adoptive parents' concerns, viewing the adoption process as '*a profound psychological transition, both for child and for the adoptive parents. This transition raises issues of loss and separation, identity and belonging*' (p.93), signifying the disruption to the adoptive parent's life as well as the adoptee's life and development, but also confirming Feeney, Passmore, & Peterson, (2007) claim that '*that adoption-related losses may be largely socially constructed*' (p.141). However, unique to this study, is the highlighting and raising of the questions for the need of adoptive parents to continually consider support and therapeutic intervention to support themselves, which in turn would indirectly support the adoptee - a factor which I feel is under researched. There is a requirement for counsellors and psychotherapists to undertake supervision, why not adoptive parents?

Relating also to the construction of self and identity formation in the adoptee, and somewhat alarming in the current climate, is the Department of Education (2014) report '*Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption*' which presents a somewhat bleak forecast for a young adoptee and how psychological/psychiatric labels are increasing with the pathologizing of adoptees; again, confirming Watkins' (2005) fear. To illustrate this point further, I have taken three tables from the report relating to the research that was undertaken; Fig.2, Fig.3 and Fig.4 show the association of the adoptee to a clinical diagnosed 'condition' from a psychiatrist, using mostly the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (see Footnote<sup>8</sup> for abbreviation list of diagnosis):

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<sup>8</sup> **Abbreviations:**

RAD Reactive Attachment Disorder

ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

**Figure 2 – Dept. of Educ. adoption report**

Going well: 10 of the 35 children had a diagnosed condition
RAD, ADHD, Asperger's
Attachment disorder, PTSD, ADHD
Speech delay
Attachment disorder, moderate learning difficulties
Attachment disorder
Learning difficulties
FASD, Dyspraxia, dyscalculia
Hearing loss
Learning difficulties
Tourette's syndrome, learning difficulties

What is interesting in Fig.2 is that, even the group presented as 'going well', there is still a 29% chance of a child receiving a diagnosis and experiencing difficulties in the adoptive home.

**Figure 3 – Dept. of Educ. adoption report**

Child has left home: 23 of the 34 children had a diagnosed condition
RAD
Asperger's syndrome, Tourettes
Asperger's syndrome
OCD
Attachment disorder
Motor coordination, eating disorder
PTSD
Attachment disorder
Attachment disorder
Neurofibromatosis type 1
Attachment disorder
RAD, hyperactive
Attachment disorder, Semantic pragmatic disorder, Asperger's syndrome
FASD, PTSD, hyperkinetic personality disorder
Developmental delay, trauma, lower borderline functioning, Abnormal brain activity in the frontal lobe, ASD
ADHD, Attachment disorder
ADHD, FASD, Attachment disorder
ADHD, conduct disorder, personality disorder
Attachment disorder, PTSD with dissociative amnesia, atypical autism, emerging personality disorder, ADHD, semantic pragmatic difficulties, developmental delay

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PTSD Post-traumatic Stress Disorder  
FASD Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder  
ADD Attention Deficit Disorder  
OCD Obsessive Compulsive Disorder  
BESD Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties

RAD, PTSD, dissociative disorder, sleep disorder
Attachment disorder, Anxiety
Attachment disorder, Speech and language difficulties impairment in receptive language,
Hyperkinetic conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, ADHD, PTSD, developmental trauma
Dyslexia audio and visual

Fig.3 shows a bleaker forecast with the adoptee initially in placement but then left either by their own choice or social care intervention; this shows a 68% chance of the child receiving a diagnosis.

**Figure 4 - Dept. of Educ. adoption report**

Challenging but child at home: 26 of the 34 children had a diagnosed condition
Severe attachment disorder
Dyslexia
Depression, ADHD
ADD/ADHD, Asperger's/ASD, social and general anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, early childhood trauma
Attachment disorder, OCD, ADHD, ASD, BESD, Bi-polar body dysmorphic
ADHD, attachment disorder
Dyslexia
Depression
Learning difficulties
Dyslexia, depression, hyper-vigilance, dyspraxia, FASD
Delayed speech
Moderate learning difficulties, attachment disorder, depression
Sensory integration disorder, attachment disorder, executive functioning disorder, dyspraxia
ADHD
ADHD, shaken baby syndrome
ADHD, ASD
Attachment disorder, selective mutism, Asperger's
Atypical ASD, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum disorder, ASD
Dyscalculia, dyslexia
ADHD
RAD, ASD traits, Conduct disorder
Attachment disorder
Developmental delay
Memory deficits - brain damage
Oppositional defiant disorder
Dyslexia

Fig. 4 is the bleakest forecast and somewhat worrying with 76% (being the highest percentage) with adoptees receiving a diagnosis whilst still in the *adoptive home*. This raises important questions to the nature of adoption as a form of 'intervention/child support', if the very 'intervention/support system' is not fulfilling the ameliorate process it professes to

foster, and is potentially causing greater distress. The concern of adoptees being disenfranchised and marginalised due to the diagnosis also increases, resulting in the adoptee being placed within a minority group, again complimenting Watkins (2005) and thus supporting Lifton's (2009) claim of a society setting any group of people apart, both exalting and dehumanizing them. *'In neither case does it allow them to be like others'* (p. 32), once again setting the adoptee apart from their fellow humans.

However, there is a strong evidence base for the benefits of adoption. The Evan B. Donaldson Institute (2014) show and report a vital need to achieve permanency for children in care, extolling the benefits and support that gaining a positive permanent family, home, parents, and environment can give through the process of adoption. Miles (2003) study did a meta-analysis focusing on identity formation and found no definitive evidence to say that adolescent adoptees experienced any more issues than non-adoptees at this period of life; citing Grotevant et al. (2000) stating, *'although the identity task may be more complex for adopted than non-adopted persons, this does not imply that there is anything pathological about it.'* (p. 22), supporting Watkins (2005). However, one cannot ignore the significance of the DfE (2014) report and the continual literature (**see section 2.1**) that reports and confirms the 'troubles and issues' that the process of adoption can cause for the adoptee, the adoptive parents and the birth family of the adoptee.

## 2.4 Sexuality

*Our sexuality is one of the core ways we know ourselves and think about our relationships with others. We are sexual from birth through old-age – we are sexual until we die. Sexuality [i]s all that we are as women and men including the ways that we relate with other women and men in our lives...encompass[ing] the connection sexuality has to our bodies, emotions, spiritual nature, and intellect; how we see ourselves as sexual beings; and how we handle our sexual lives.* (Heasley & Crane, 2002, p.2)

Heasley & Crane present an all-encompassing definition touching on all aspects of the human life. They break the definition down even further highlighting the interconnections and complexities that are attributed to the single word of 'sexuality'; for example, '*all that we are*' they claim takes us into: '*self-esteem, body image, emotions, spirituality and intellectual strength*', and '*how we relate to other women and men takes us to: sexual orientation, relationships, sexual choices and reproductive choices*' (p.2). This helps the reader look deeper into their own life and the ways one conducts and relates in one's life; although one must question the gender essentialism that is explicit in their definition (women and men). Therefore, not taking into account those that do not see themselves as conforming to the gender divide or existing within its parameters.

If we then move into different theoretical perspectives on human sexuality, below Lehmiller (2014, p.9) provides a tabled summary (see table.1) of the major psychological theories:

**Table 1 - Psychological Theories of Sexuality**

<i>Theory</i>	<i>Main Points</i>
<b>Psychoanalytic theory - (Freud, 1920)</b>	Personality structure consisting of the id, ego, and superego drives behavior. Sexual abnormalities arise when individuals become fixated during one of the psychosexual stages of development.
<b>Classical conditioning – (Pavlov, 1927)</b>	Repeated pairing of a neutral stimulus with one that produces a specific behavior will eventually lead the neutral stimulus to elicit the same behavior.
<b>Operant conditioning – (Skinner, 1938)</b>	Reinforced behaviors increase in frequency; punished behaviors decrease. Reinforcement is more effective than punishment.
<b>Social/Observational learning – (Bandura, Ross &amp; Ross, 1962)</b>	Behavior can be learned through observation of others (e.g., peers, parents) or through media exposure, including pornography.
<b>Exchange perspectives – (Baumeister &amp; Vohs, 2004)</b>	Exchange of resources is fundamental to social relationships. Behavior is driven by perceived costs and benefits derived from trades occurring between partners.
<b>Personality theories – (McCrae &amp; Costa, 1987; Fisher et al., 1988; Zuckerman, Eysenck &amp; Eysenck, 1978; Geen, 1997)</b>	Relatively stable individual traits generate consistent patterns of behavior across situations. Big Five, erotophobia-erotophilia, sensation seeking, and sociosexuality are major personality traits associated with sexual behavior
<b>Evolutionary theory – (Hinsz, Matz &amp; Patience, 2001)</b>	Human beings are motivated to produce as many of their own offspring as possible. We have evolved preferences for physical and psychological traits and characteristics in sexual partners that promote reproductive success.

**Biopsychosocial model – (Engel, 1977)**

Biological, psychological, and social factors interact to produce variations in sexual orientations and behaviors. The mind and body are fundamentally intertwined. Sexual health is not just the absence of biological dysfunction; it runs on a continuum with varying degrees of sexual illness and wellness.

Lehmiller goes into more detail within his book, discussing the different theories and how they have informed sexuality. I have provided this summary as an example, and to give a flavour of the range of psychological theories that are attributed to sexuality.

From a sociological perspective (Brickell, 2006a, 2006b; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Gamson & Mood, 2004; Heasley & Crane, 2002; Rahman & Jackson, 2010), sexuality is viewed from the social systems at the micro (personal) and macro (societal) level looking deeply into the social forces that shape and influence ‘sexual norms’. Heasley and Crane (2002) draw our attention to, *‘family, religion, education, media, government policy, and even economics’* claiming that *‘the influence of these social institutions is a product of distribution of power in culture’* (p.3), taking us into the realms of the socio-political - an area synonymous with Foucault and Queer theory<sup>9</sup> (Morland & Willox, 2004; Sedgwick, 1990; Spargo, 1999).

Rahman & Jackson (2010) support the above view, focusing their sociological view of sexuality through the lenses of *‘social change; social conflict, social cohesion and social order; social hierarchies, divisions and inequalities; social identities; modernity/late modernity/postmodernity’* (p.3), which intrinsically presents the socio-political systems of human living, and how these systems are influenced by power/knowledge.

Foucault (1976, 1979, 1980) states that there exists a network of power/knowledge that we as societal individuals cannot be separated from. It infiltrates every aspect of our lives and existence, working its way through every facet of our social and individual worlds. Foucault is saying we are subjects to the power/knowledge regime, subjugated through the

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<sup>9</sup> Spargo (1999) claims, ‘Queer theory is not a singular or systematic conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with relations between sex, gender and sexual desire’ (p.9) (Also see Gamson, 2000; Morland & Willox, 2004)

dominant discourses we exist in. Foucault's (1976) ground-breaking example of this process, whilst highlighting the dominate power regimes and how they marginalised and disenfranchise certain groups, is his example of the 'homosexual'.

*Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species* (p.43).

What is notable and perhaps sometimes misread (Norton, 2008) with the above quote is that Foucault was not saying that same-sex relations did not exist before '*Westphal's article of 1870*' (cited in 1976, p.43). What Foucault inferred and advocated with his 'homosexual was now a species' axiom, was an introduction and social construction of a marginalized and disenfranchised identity category; a descriptor that neatly grouped people that performed same-sex relations previously known as sodomy together. The act of performance (sodomy) had now been transformed into a marginalized identity – that of a homosexual.

Foucault's ideas are also associated with some feminist thinking (Butler, 1990, 1992; Garbacik, 2013; Morland & Willox, 2004; Rahman & Jackson, 2010). Butler (1990) is most notable for challenging the ontological basis of the essentialism agenda when referring to sex/gender. She questions and opposes these heteronormative categories as 'normal, exclusive and natural', proposing that sexuality and gender are actually fluid forms, but due to repeated performances over time, are then given the impression/category of an essential/natural quality.

This is also confirmed through Goffman's sociological theory (1959) of the individual as 'social actor', claiming that selves as gendered are outcomes of the socially and culturally embedded performances of the individual, not innate presentations of internal biological truths. Goffman (1977) did not see or believe there to be any particular distinctiveness between 'sex' as a biological division of male and female, and the concept of 'gender' that denotes the social creation of boys, girls, men and women. For Goffman, the differences in the

embodied self are a product of language and the meaning values that inform them. Therefore, the 'doing' of a social performance creates an illusion of a repeated notion of what appears to be a 'natural' act (Brickell, 2006a; Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler and McKenna, 1978). As Brickell (2006a), quite rightly states, '*an argument that presages Judith Butler's suggestion that language performatively constitutes those sex/gender categories of which it speaks*' (p.93).

Gagnon and Simon's (1974/2002) pivotal work '*Sexual Conduct*', highly criticises Freudian psychoanalytical psychosexual drive theory, and proposed that sexuality and sexual behaviour are dependent on the acquisition and application of 'sexual scripts'. They suggested that sexuality and conduct is a meaningful reflexive process, whereby sexual scripts are learnt by the individual (culturally dependent) to ascertain sexual acts, understanding of sexual responses and internal states, and distinguishing non-sexual aspects of living. Three forms of scripts are said to exist to learn and apply to one's life: cultural scenarios - cultural narratives, beliefs and values; interpersonal scripting - the negotiating of cultural scenarios to our own specific sexual situation; and intrapsychic scripting - the reflexive self-dialogue. What is significant with Gagnon and Simon's concept is the critique of biological determinism<sup>10</sup> and psychoanalytical thought, which posits that their concept of 'sexual scripts' not only gives the individual agency to change their sexual self, but develops a distinction between sexuality and gender. They challenge the psychoanalytic conflation of sexuality and gender suggesting that being masculine or feminine does not automatically make the assumption of being heterosexual, therefore allowing a greater choice with one's sexual identity and conduct.

Autumn Elizabeth (2013) takes this process a step further by challenging, what she suggests is, '*Western society operat[ing] in a traditionally binary thought system*' (p.329), and opens up the debate and explores, '*the sexual identities beyond homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality*' (p.329). Elizabeth looks at transsexuality and focuses on alternative definitions to

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<sup>10</sup> Garbacik (2013) states, 'Biological determinism is a theory hypothesising that genes and early biology shape humans absolutely, including our abilities and personalities' (p.21) (see also Lewontin, 1982; Stein, 2011; Witt, 2008)



the binary system proposing, pansexuality and pomosexuality – these are inclusive categories or descriptors that allow a greater range of sexual identity, sexual attraction and sexual orientation, including diverse multifaceted and complex expressions of sexuality outside of the heterosexual/homosexual division. Elizabeth wants to, *‘challenge several standard dichotomies in western society, while suggesting ways that further research could continue to deconstruct the multiple vectors of oppression caused by strict dichotomies’* (p.331), pertaining to and promoting greater equality and diversity within western culture, which feels more in line and current with a postmodern perspective.

This is further supported by Garbacik (2013) who takes the traditional LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual) acronym into a whole new postmodern realm. She proposes and supports the inclusive LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, genderqueer, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, ally, and asexual) acronym. Garbacik, from an activist standpoint, questions the very notion of equality, posing the question: How do we measure gender equality when our society’s definitions of male and female leave out much of the population? Not only is Garbacik challenging Elizabeth’s (2013) *‘western binary thought systems’* of heterosexual/homosexual, she also challenges the LGBT community stating that, *‘gay and lesbian communities have long marginalized bisexual and transgender people. Intersex people are...left out of LGBT issues and forums [and] asexuality is seldom included’* (p.3). From a personal perspective, I can vouch for the above statement. However, regarding Garbacik’s new acronym, it does raise questions as to the need to categorise and to keep putting groups of people into neat divided boxes. Is this process not in itself a form of support for the ever-growing divide between people’s identities and an implicit form of discrimination in its own right?

In the UK, Vizard (2014) conducted an interesting study for *‘The Office for National Statistics (ONS)’*, aiming to, *‘rigorously develop, test, and implement a question measuring sexual identity on a large-scale general household survey.’* (p.524). What is significant to this was the

focus group's response to the pilot tests and the focus on sexual identity and not sexual orientation. Their reason:

ONS focused on collecting data on sexual identity, which is how people see themselves at the time the interview takes place. The reason for this:

*is that no single question would capture the complexity of sexual orientation, and a suite of questions would be required to fully collect the different dimensions of sexual orientation. Research during the development of the question also deemed sexual identity the most relevant dimension of sexual orientation to investigate given its relationship to experiences of disadvantage and discrimination. (p.526)*

However, they are making the assumption that sexual identity correlates with sexual orientation, which according to the results did conclude; although when examining the participants from the focus groups, we find that the *'[p]articipants for each focus group were homogeneous with respect to sexual identity and sex (e.g., heterosexual men, heterosexual women, gay men, gay/lesbian women, bisexual men, and bisexual women)'* (p.528). Thus, not taking into account any other identity outside of the 'binary thought system', and the possibility of sexual identity not always correlating with one's sexual orientation; therefore skewing the results with the very participants they used. Although they do in passing make note, *'that not all those who are attracted to people of the same sex or engage in same-sex behavior identify themselves as LGB'* (p.541). Yet they only exclusively include these three categories in the UK measure. How many people then do not neatly fit into these categories? And how do they feel in relation to their identities 'not being nationally recognised', only in the section of 'Other'? Which suggests the implicit forms of discrimination that exist within the UK government's recognition 'or not' of certain citizens that reside and live within its country.

The ambiguity and complexity of sexuality is further supported by Priebe & Svedin (2013), and Richters et al. (2014), where both studies looked at sexual identity, sexual

attraction, and sexual behaviour. Both studies found that these three factors did not always neatly correlate with each other, for example an individual identifying as heterosexual male or homosexual female, did not always match their sexual behaviour, or sexual attraction, with the individuals preferring at times to stay in same-sex relationships, or opposite-sex relationships for reasons other than sex or sexual attraction. Kelly (2002) warrants a similar report with her paper titled, '*I am a Queer Heterosexual*'. Again, examining the multiplicity of sexual identity, sexual behaviour and sexual attraction, adopting the word '*queer*' to open up and present a political act '*that goes beyond lesbian and gay men.*' (p.400) In the paper, she talks of her sexual relationships with lesbians, heterosexual women, heterosexual men, and gay men, showing a reality whereby people who identify under a certain label (e.g. gay) do not necessarily always have sexual relationships with people of the same-sex. This also suggests that sexual identity is not always synonymous with sexual behaviour, noting that sexual identity can at times be more of a political act than a sexual one. Stein (2011) develops this further focusing on sexual politics and why the essentialist stance (supported by some Lesbian and Gay activists) is important to substantiating and developing sexual minority group's rights in Western culture. Kelly's (2002) blurring of the essentialist boundaries of heterosexuality/homosexuality undermines and threatens, what Stein would call their 'essentialist argument of innate sexuality', thus in affect damaging their political rights in the Western world. Although Kelly and Garbacik (2013), in opposition to sexual oppression, argue that the essentialist stance is fundamentally discriminatory/oppressive, and both argue that the word '*queer*' is a potent weapon in the fight against sexual oppression and discrimination.

#### **2.4.1 Existential Sexuality**

If we now move into the realms of existentialism, we can find further support and clarification of the sociological construction of sexual identity and sexuality, and its

complexity. Spinelli (2014) addresses this subject with his leanings toward a fluidity and non-fixed stance on *being sexual*, as opposed to sexuality being a defined identity per se. He makes reference to Sear's (2010) research which expands on the confusion and elusiveness of sexuality as a topic of interest, with Spinelli concluding that sexuality is a social phenomenon owned by us all, and not some exclusive subject which scientists/experts can define. The aim of the paper is to challenge three Western widely held assumptions regarding *being sexual*: 1. that sexuality is biological and is the driving force toward reproduction and survival of our species, 2. given proposition 1, sexuality is then either a 'natural reproductive activity' or an 'unnatural perverted activity not driven by reproduction', 3. that self-identity is strongly and predominately determined by one's sexual activity e.g. homosexual acts equals a homosexual identity. Spinelli challenges these key points and falsifies their claims from an existential perspective. His reference to Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 1968) work and concepts of *embodied consciousness* and how sexual encounter is used to interrelate and understand the other, shows that reproductive expression is only one of many ways to express sexually to achieve a desired outcome or act; and our desire to know the other and our self through our sexual engagements is fundamental to human inter-subjectivity and the existential given of relatedness.

This is a convincing argument and highlights that '*human sexuality becomes the consciousness of being sexual*' and not a '*predetermined drive*' for species survival. Given this stance it quickly undermines and lays bare the ambiguous concept of proposition 2, which Spinelli maintains citing Roughgarden's (2009) study on natural selection and social selection where she gives examples of animals and other species showing same sex groupings, swapping gender roles and same sex acts. It also shows that if sexual expression is a varied and multi-layered act of interrelating and existential knowing, then any expression is natural and human per se due to the individuals or group involved. Any attempt therefore to 'unnaturalise' a sexual act or 'state as perverted' is preposterous, as it would then claim that being human per se is also unnatural.

Foucault (1979) and the work of Plummer (1981) also question the concept of sexual identity determining one's intrinsic self-identity; highlighting labelling and language constructs enforced by hegemonic groups. Spinelli builds on Plummer's ideas and makes some interesting points in relation to the self-construct. This parallels Rogers (1959) work on the self-concept which is made up of introjected values and conditions of worth. Spinelli is saying that a fixed self-construct is reinforced overtime to create a sediment/fixed image of one's identity whereby one's beliefs/values are held tight, unwavering and fixed, i.e., exclusive identity of being heterosexual or LGBT and all the values and beliefs that make up those constructs are fixed overtime, with the dissociation or denying of any experience that challenges these self-constructs. What Spinelli is then saying is that the determining factor that holds one's self-construct together is not biological/genetic or 'natural' factors but actually *existential choice*. This is an important argument and supports the sociological constructionist argument which fundamentally challenges essentialism, and places *being sexual* in a socially interrelated context within the realms of social conditioning and political hegemonic groups determining what is 'normal' and 'not normal' (Brickell, 2006a, 2006b, Butler, 1990, 1994; Kelly, 2002; Goffman, 1959; Rahman & Jackson, 2010).

Medina (2014), also from an existential viewpoint, however challenges Spinelli's sexual fluidity and strongly advocates an essentialism and innate sexuality born within the human. From a homosexual stance he opposes and highlights what he deems Spinelli's nonappreciation, '*that for many of us the relational dimension to sexual attraction is informed with a prior sense of attraction to [the] same-sex*' (p.125). What is interesting and somewhat contradictory in his argument is the notion and agreement on a '*relational dimension*', and further claims, '*that it is precisely in the nuances of our experience of a specific other that attraction develops and the sexual dimension reveals itself*' (p.125). If this is true, he is then agreeing with Spinelli, but notably is applying aspects of discrimination in one's ability to be open and authentic with the other. Can we as human beings so firmly deny one aspect of living than

another, and excuse an attraction solely on the basis of cultural stereotypes or a belief in an innate drive? Medina cites the gay and lesbian essentialist argument, yet misses the political aspects of Stein's (2011) previous point, which also raises the question and again confirms Spinelli (2015) and Roger's (1957, 1959) ideas of a fixed/sediment self-construct that denies and distorts experience to 'fit' with one's cultural and personal values and beliefs. If one is feeling personally threatened and possibly socio-politically dismissed by a viewpoint (e.g. sexual fluidity), which could undermine a minority groups fight and hard-earned rights to establish themselves within a society; then it does make sense that the individuals within that minority group would want to 'fly their banner' and substantiate their argument and thus align with the dominate hegemonic groups ideas. In effect, the minority group uses the same ideology as the dominate hegemonic group to counter and establish their own rights within that existing society, therefore using the essentialist argument (Garbacik, 2013; Stein, 2011; Stone, 2004; Witt, 2008).

Medina concludes his paper by posing and presenting the statement, *'human sexuality...is not about others telling us what 'we all are', it is a question of the individual saying, 'who I am'* (p.135). This is moving toward an autonomous self-identifying identity, but it still raises questions toward social context and cultural 'norms and beliefs'. It feels more fitting to conclude with Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) narrative construction of the self who cite Trinh Minha (1991), *'the question of identity is moving away from traditional queries into 'who am I' to progressively become questions of 'when, where, and how am I'* (p.105). This promotes a multiplicity of self in-line with postmodern thought, she further states, *'There is no real me to return to, no whole self that synthesizes the woman'* (p.105). What we have is a relational being dependent on contextual engagement, but can we find a coherence to our self and life within this multiplicity and complexity? The possible answer comes and can be found in the narrative/self-coherence; therefore, we create and tell our life stories, our day to day understanding and experiences that we relate to ourselves through self-dialogue and/or

dialogue relating to the other, this way we create and find a self that is coherent and consistent to our lives (Adams & McAdler, 2007a, 2007b; Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013; Etherington, 2004; Holstein & Gubruim, 2000; McAdams, 2001, 2006; Singer, 2004).

Finally, I'll conclude this section from the person-centred perspective. Very little has been written on sexuality, with Peter Schimd (2006) being the only theorist to actually address this subject from a theoretical standpoint. He states:

*Human sexualities are manifestations in various forms of the actualizing tendency as a basic, on principle constructive and trustworthy transcending force in life at one and the same time both to creatively actualize one's potential of being a sexual (i.e. a male or a female or a hermaphrodite) person (self-actualization and self-transcendence, i.e. the substantial dimension of being a person) and aiming at engaging in creative, intimate and lustful relationships characterized by a sexual tension (i.e. a physical-psychological-spiritual tension resulting from the perception of the sex of the other person or a substitute/representative of it) (actualization and transcendence of the person, the relational dimension of being a person). (p.42)*

Schimd is saying that the human potential for sexual expression is organically met through the human's actualizing tendency, to engage in relational encounters with the other or self to satisfy one's sexual potential. The incongruence, alienation or suffering with one's sexual expression or desire or lack thereof, comes from Roger's (1959) idea of experience being threatening to the organism and self-concept, with Roger's (1957) theory of therapy intervening to assist the client to find meaning and congruence with their sexuality. In some respects, this feels inclusive of Lehmiller's (2014) biopsychosocial model, which incorporates a, 'complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.' (p.21), therefore taking the innate drive of the actualising tendency through the relational and social influences of human interaction, group life, and personal reflexive living, and then experiencing and seeing how this creates and shapes the person.

## 2.5 Adoption & Sexuality

One of the first references to sexuality within the adoption experience comes from Lifton (1979, 2009). Lifton makes passing commentary toward adoptees' feelings of isolation and loneliness in adolescence due to an inability to learn intimacy, referring to Erikson's (1950) developmental model with an adoptee having a tendency to experience issues with 'generativity'.<sup>11</sup> She further states, a somewhat alarming discriminatory viewpoint, with '*it is no coincidence that many adoptees, isolated as they have been from a sense of true relatedness, choose homosexuality or bisexuality as an alternative lifestyle*' (p.66). Clearly, for Lifton, homosexual relations and bisexual relations do not warrant as '*true relatedness*'. She then goes on to quote adoptees that identify as lesbian or gay, attributing this sexual identity as an outcome of their hostile feelings toward their birth fathers or mothers; although, encouragingly, she does make reference to this being an under-research area with a need to expand research around this subject.

Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992) also refer to Erikson's (1950) developmental model, and attribute adoptee issues with sexual identity or sexual development to this model. They also refer to physiological hormonal changes in the adolescent and how these affect sexual attraction and sexual experimentation. They make several points, the first regarding their concept of '*sexual expression and the 'bad seed*' (p.110), again pathologising adoptees and making assumptions that the adoptee will experience a tendency to follow in their birth family history with, '*Adopted teenagers...born to teenage mothers may feel the cycle repeating itself in their own sexual behavior*' (p.110). This however is confirmed by Eleanor (pseudonym) an adoptee in Harris (2012); Eleanor states, '*I also held a deep-rooted fear of becoming pregnant and finding*

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<sup>11</sup> Cherry (2016) states, 'Generativity refers to "making your mark" on the world through caring for others as well as creating and accomplishing things that make the world a better place'.



*myself with an unwanted pregnancy as my birth mother had done*' (p.241), she also cites this as one reason for her being a lesbian, '*Having a relationship with a woman avoided this issue*' (p.241).

Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig (1992) also present the '*incest taboo*', as well as sexual identity and the 'confusion' an adoptee can experience if they think they were adopted due to being the wrong gender, causing, '*the adoptee's imitation of the opposite sex, resulting in a confused identity*' (p.144). Does this raise questions to genderism and sexual identity, or even sexual orientation, - although it does show the implicit discrimination toward minority groups within this text. Their enduring pessimistic tone concludes, '*An adoptees emerging sexuality can be complicated for the whole family*' (p.110), which does not leave the adoptee with a positive or non-pathologised view of sexual development.

Verrier (2009) UK edition, although first published in the USA in 1993, also raises the concept of '<sup>12</sup>*genetic sexual attraction*' and the '*incest taboo*' (p.139-140). She warns the adoptee and birth mother and father of this potential risk, especially in the reunion process. She states, '*sensual/sexual feelings are natural between birth mothers and their children, both male and female, between fathers and daughters, and between siblings*'. (p.141) Verrier, like Lifton, raises questions with homosexual identity in adoptees, she says:

*I do have a suspicion, based on interviews with several lesbian adoptees, that part of what they are searching for in lesbian relationships is a closeness with the feminine that was mother.'* (p.141)

This maybe the case, but given the complexities of socio-political living and existing, a lot more needs to be done in this area to establish Verrier's 'suspicion'.

Greenberg (1993) and Greenberg and Littlewood (1995) found in their studies, that according to them, the phenomena of '*genetic sexual attraction (GSA)*' existed and seemed to be a recurring theme in adoption reunion with the adoptee and birth parent. They firmly

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<sup>12</sup> GSA-forums (2012) define it as: 'Intense sexual desire that can arise between genetically related people [sic] who are united in Adulthood, after having been denied the opportunity to form proper emotional bonds'.

challenge Freudian and Westermarck's assumptions regarding the psychological and behavioural avoidance of incest within a culture. What is notable in the studies is the researcher's need to distinguish, GSA, from incest. Their reasons are for the '*damaging social implications*' of incest to the families and people involved, but also GSA, '*involves consenting adults and there is no betrayal of a child by an adult in a position of trust*' (p.19). They refer to psychotherapeutic intervention and the difficulties involved with this phenomena with the need to establish support networks and possibly change aspects of the law around the legal ramifications. Greenberg (1993) makes a concluding transparent disclosure regarding his own personal feelings:

*I have found myself unable to dismiss the uncomfortable sense of abnormality, of wrong and of dissatisfaction which continues to be expressed by both some clients and their counsellors. I do not believe this would be eradicated completely by any modification of the law, because it seems to me to reflect some deep-seated universal discomfort.* (p.20)

The incest taboo or GSA, according to Greenberg, is a universal cultural phenomenon, which should be respected, a position Verrier (2009), Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig (1992), and Lifton (1979, 2009) also share. Hoopes (1990) also makes clear reference to this regarding identity formation in the adoptee, and citing Easson (1973) sees the incest taboo, as one of three sexual conflicts that need to be addressed in order for a healthy sexual identity to be developed in the adoptee. The other two are the adoptee's emancipation from the adoptive parents, and '*the final identification with the parent of the same sex and the concomitant development of mutuality with the opposite sex parent*' (p.151), based in the Oedipus and Electra<sup>13</sup> complex of psychoanalytical theory.

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<sup>13</sup> McLeod (2008) states, 'The child becomes aware of anatomical sex differences, which sets in motion the conflict between erotic attraction, resentment, rivalry, jealousy and fear which Freud called the **Oedipus complex** (in boys) and the **Electra complex** (in girls). This is resolved through the process of identification, which involves the child adopting the characteristics of the same sex parent'. (see Freud, 1920)

As previously stated this is a sparse area of research, so I'll conclude this section with two adoptees expressing aspects of their sexuality and adoption from Harris (2012):

Jenny (pseudonym):

*being adopted and being gay have, among other things, made me different. Being different has led me to seek out a diverse family life. This has been challenging at times, but has allowed me to appreciate that the western nuclear family is not necessarily the only family I can embrace. (p.203).*

Eleanor (pseudonym):

*As I was becoming more comfortable with my identity and sexuality, after coming out to my adoptive parents...I was suddenly being pulled back by the horrible cruelty of being rejected a second time...my birth mother was not so much a victim of circumstance but cold and uncaring...I called her 'the Ice Queen'. (p.242)*

Both examples show the ongoing challenges an adoptee can experience with the continuing fear of non-acceptance and rejection, from not only society, but sadly also from the birth family.

## **2.6 Nature Vs Nurture**

When relating the nature vs nurture debate to sexuality from within the lens of adoption, the majority of research and literature points to several areas. The first is relating to sexuality of the adoptee, as any other human being, and accounting for this from an essentialist/nature viewpoint. The nature debate argues that 'human nature' is fundamentally biologically based and that a biological determinism states that being male and female equals a sexual attraction and desire to the opposite sex, which is evidenced by the natural sexual anatomical functioning and body anatomy to accompany this, e.g. men have penises, and women have a vagina both necessary for procreation (Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers,

2001; Stein, 2011; Witt, 2008). However, this essentialism argument is not as simple as we first perceive, or even solely biologically determined, as according to Rahman and Jackson (2010):

*spiritual and psychological essentialism has also been a significant feature of western thought...In both social influences on gender and sexuality are downplayed or ignored [therefore] sexually active women have been described as 'spiritually fallen'...and homosexuals have been ...characterized as sinful or perverted. (p.17).*

This shows the complexity to the argument and the clear 'social and psychological' aspects that are implicitly used to inform it (Garbacik, 2013; Heasley & Crane, 2002; Lawler, 2013; Rahman & Jackson, 2010).

There are recent studies in neuroscience and biology that are convinced of biological and genetic differences that determine sexual orientation and sexuality. Ngun, Ghahramani, Sánchez, Bocklandt, and Vilain, (2011), present a clear and in-depth review of this area citing numerous studies and theorists to evidence the biological, neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and hormonal/gonadal factors, and how these influence sexual orientation, sexual disorders, genetic functioning, and gender identity. What they are presenting is one's sexual orientation and gender identity as already determined at birth, therefore one will be born homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual and even transgender. They do show significant research to evidence this, but the social and environmental factors are not taken into account, nevertheless from their perspective they are not attributable to sexuality. This also aligns with Swab (2007), Bagemihil (1999), Bailey & Pillard, (1991), Hamer, (1993, 1999), and Le Vay, (1991) who also look at sexual orientation and how genetics and sexual differentiation of the brain affects sexuality, finding similar evidence, although not always conclusive, for an innate sexual orientation.

Relating this stance to the adoptee, then irrespective of the adoptee's attachment styles, parental influences, socialisation, relational living, and socio-political influences, this

nature argument would posit that the adoptee's sexual orientation, sexual identity and sexual behaviour are a predetermined given at birth.

If we move into the realms of the opposing nurture/constructionist argument, they claim that a person's sexuality and gender are highly influenced, if not in some cases (sociological thinking) solely influenced, by one's social relational living (Brickell, 2006a, 2006b; Burr, 2003; Garbacik, 2013; Lawler, 2013; Rahman & Jackson, 2010; Spinelli, 2014). The developing of social values and beliefs from one's culture, and the influence of education, politics, religion, media, and social and family life, all contribute in some way to the creating of one's sexual development, sexual identity and sexual behaviour (**see section 2.4**). Again, if we relate this to the adoptee, not only is the adoptee's sexuality, sexual identity and sexual behaviour influenced by the social world, the adoptee's 'sense of self' or concept of self (i.e. how the adoptee perceives their self) is determined by these factors. Therefore, how can we determine or even begin to understand and categorise the individual, to a prescriptive model of understanding? This idea questions the very notion of theoretical thought and frameworks that constitute a specific stylised and 'expert' prescriptive way of understanding the human being; for example, Freudian psychoanalytical thought, Biological determinism, and purely sociological theories (e.g. Marxism<sup>14</sup>). Theorists, do account for the adoptee's sexuality within the adoption literature, for example Verrier (2009), Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992, and Lifton (1979, 2009), but again their analysis is from a prescriptive psychoanalytical perspective.

What seems possible and more inclusive, when looking at sexuality within adoption, is the biopsychosocial viewpoint (Heasley & Crane, 2002; Lehmiller, 2014; Le Vay & Baldwin, 2012; Schimd, 2006). This takes into account the adoptee's genetic biology, their psychological functioning, and the social factors that have influenced their sexual

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<sup>14</sup> Rahman & Jackson (2010) state, 'Marxism...its central rationale was the explanation of inequality as social in origin and as built into the structure of society'. (p.64) (see also Burkitt, 2008; Burr, 2003)

development and identity. From this perspective, it seems possible, that the surest way to understanding the uniqueness and idiographic perspective of the adoptee would be from their self-understanding and 'frame of reference', therefore the adoptee would present their own understanding and perception of self and how they orient in their world. This would denote and maintain the need for qualitative research and psychotherapeutic methods that support and assist adoptees in this process. Irrespective of how the adoptee understands their sexuality (i.e. innate, constructed or a mixture of both), their 'frame of reference' and perspective would be the 'expert' in their process of self-understanding and positioning within their social worlds. This upholds inclusive egalitarian practice, which fosters non-discrimination and equality (BACP, 2015; Bond, 2004, 2015; DfE, 2013b, 2014; Etherington, 2007; West, 2002).

However, there are polarities within this process from a therapeutic viewpoint. The first is the controversial, and according to the BACP (2012) an unethical and damaging form of therapy, conversion/reparative therapy<sup>15</sup> (see Drescher, 2002; Shidlo, Shroeder, & Drescher, 2002). In the 1970s, this involved a process of operant conditioning, usually electric shock treatment was administered, when the individual thought homosexual thoughts and had homosexual desires (Pinknews, 2016; Shidlo, Shroeder, & Drescher, 2002). This has now been outlawed in modern western societies, although conversion/reparative psychotherapy is still available to those individuals that wish to receive it and undergo the 'treatment'.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have 'existential' (see Gamsu, 2014; Milton, 2014; Spinelli, 2015; Yalom, 1980) and 'person-centred' (see Mearns, 2006; Rogers, 1951, 1957, 1980; Schimd, 2015) therapies. These, on the whole, denote an egalitarian relational therapeutic space for the client to explore their life and self in an ethically safe and accepting therapeutic way. This is formed through the therapist's ability to enter into the client's world

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<sup>15</sup> Zand (2015) states, 'Modern gay conversion therapy, according to organisations that promote it, can enable people to change or reduce their "homosexual tendencies" through "standard psychotherapeutic and counselling techniques".'

and act as an empathic and authentic companion on the client's journey into self; which in turn assists the client to gain greater clarity and self-understanding leading to potential self-empowerment and resolution to their presenting concerns. I claim, as a practitioner of these forms of therapy, that the latter form of therapy to be the most conducive and ethical as a therapeutic intervention; although this is not to disparage other forms of cognitive, behavioural and psychoanalytical therapies, and undermine their efficacy.

If we now briefly look at this also from the research perspective (which will be covered in more depth in **Chapter 3**), we have the quantitative approaches that objectify the participant, leading to generalisations of populations presented through numerical data (see Dyer, 2006; Dyer & Joseph, 2006; Sanders & Wilkins, 2010); and the qualitative approaches that look more at idiographic, individual, and subjective aspects of research with an emphasis on the researcher understanding the phenomena from the participant's 'frame of reference'; usually involving open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups (See Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2011; Etherington, 2004; McLeod, 2010, 2011; West, 2001, 2011, 2013). As previously stated qualitative approaches would assist the adoptee to gain self-understanding and moments of clarity regarding their own existence and reality.

Concluding this section, what becomes clear, is the complexity and interrelating of this nature vs nurture debate; raising the question: is it appropriate or even conceivable to deny the forces of one area or another? Can the multiplicity of human existence, and especially human sexuality, be reduced to only one aspect of the argument?

## **2.7 Summary**

From within this chapter, I've looked at the subject of adoption from the perspectives of attachment theory (Bart et al., 2005; Grant-Marsney, Grotevant & Sayer, 2015; Hoopes, 1990; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Van London et al., 2007; Zaccagnino et al., 2015), and how this can be affected through separation from the birth mother and the interim use of foster care

homes. This was followed by an adoptee's self-formation and how different theories account for this, raising questions to psychosocial factors and socio-political systems that influence this, highlighting the inherent forms of oppression and discrimination that exist (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; DfE, 2014; Lifton, 1979, 2009; Watkins, 2005). There is a clear government push to improve adoption as an intervention to those children that have been relinquished from their birth families, with a focus on increasing the number of adopters within the UK (DfE, 2013a, 2013b, 2014), which again highlights the social concern and growing awareness of families unable to cope with their lives and children.

Sexuality was also viewed and critiqued from the biological, psychological and sociological, examining how these three stances contribute to the subject of sexuality (Crooks & Baur, 2016; Elizabeth, 2014; Freud, 1920; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Gamson & Mood, 2004; Garbacik, 2013; Kimmel & Plante, 2004; Milton, 2014; Lehmiller, 2014; Le Vay & Baldwin, 2012; Stein, 2011; Plummer, 1981, 1996a, 2000, 2015; Rahman & Jackson, 2010; Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers, 2001; Spinelli, 2014).

When looking at adoption and sexuality together, the sparse research focused on the concept of the incest taboo and genetic sexual attraction (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Greenberg, 1993; Greenberg & Littlewood, 1995; Verrier, 2009). What was also significant was the pathologising of the adoptee and their sexuality through this process, again with the inherent discrimination and oppression through the theories and text (Brodzinsky, 1990; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Lifton, 1979, 2009; Verrier, 2009). The most notable being, Lifton's (1979, 2009) description of gay and lesbian relationships not constituting '*true relatedness*'.

Finally, the nature vs nurture debate was looked at and related to the adoptee and their sexuality, whilst highlighting the implications for research and therapeutic practice. This posited that the best vantage points to understand and assist the adoptee toward self-understanding and development is met through the offering of methods that support



subjective idiographic knowledge. This in turn supports greater inclusivity leading to greater ethical and egalitarian practice (BACP, 2015; Bond, 2004, 2015; DfE, 2013b, 2014; Etherington, 2007; West, 2002).

The most significant aspect of the literature review confirms the small amount of research, that has been carried out, when relating sexuality to adoption. This raises many questions, as to why this is so. Has it been missed within the adoption arena? Has the focus on loss and abandonment overshadowed this subject within adoption? Has it been deemed insignificant? Are the subjects of incest and genetic sexual attraction, too daunting of subjects to deal with? Do researchers and theorists feel that existing theories already account for and answer the questions that may be raised? Have researchers and theorists not even asked the questions or thought of the possible questions that may be significant to this subject? What is interesting is that some theorists/researchers (Greenberg, 1993; Greenberg & Littlewood, 1995; Lifton, 1979, 2009; Verrier, 2009) do suggest the need to research more in-depth in this area, yet still it seems to be an under-researched area. I do not profess to be able to answer all the questions posed here; however, what I do hope is that some possible answers are addressed in this thesis, and that it is a starting point to open dialogue around the subject of sexuality within adoption. We now move into Chapter 3 where the research philosophies, methodological choices, methods and ethical process that underpin this thesis will be explained.

## Chapter 3: Philosophies and methodologies

### 3.1 Introduction

The research question that underpins this thesis is: *How do adult adoptees make sense of, and present, their sexuality and self/identity?* This chapter will explore my philosophical and methodological choices, and the reasons why I chose the research methods that I did. I will explain the ethical processes involved and the three stages that were undertaken to collect and analyse the data in relation to the research question.

### 3.2 Ethical Practice

Ethical approval was sought from, and confirmed through, the University of Chester's ethics committee. Lone working procedures were adhered to in respect of conducting the interviews. All data have been anonymised to protect the identity of the contributors. The data were coded, and all participants allocated a pseudonym.

The data were stored in accordance with university regulations and the Data Protection Act (1998), and have been kept securely in locked premises or on encrypted computers. To guide ethical practice, I adhered to the BACP (2016) *Ethical Framework*, and Bond's (2004) *Ethical guideline for researching counselling and psychotherapy*, to avoid harm and risk to the participant and researcher. At the start of the interview, we discussed the confidentiality limitations of the data and interview process, and I gained informed consent before recording started. All participants' names have been changed in the thesis, and each person has been given a pseudonym to protect their identity, and to uphold confidentiality and anonymity. West (2002) and West and Byrne (2009) raise some concerns regarding research in counselling and psychotherapy, especially on the subject of informed consent. Given the sensitive nature of counselling and psychotherapy, and the personal disclosure of participants, West and Byrne (2009) suggest:

*that informed consent remains highly problematic...[creating] the illusion that getting a research participant to sign a written consent form after a brief conversation is enough.'*  
(p.315).

They agree with McLeod (2001) and would wish for a threefold process of consent throughout the research project, consisting of, '*initial consent, process consent throughout the project, and closure consent at the end of the project.*' (p.316)

Bond (2004) also supports this process stating:

*[S]ome risks may only become apparent as the research progresses. Best practice includes the possibility of consultations with sources of appropriate expertise whenever the researcher encounters unanticipated risks or faces significant ethical dilemmas.* (p.5)

The telling of one's sexual history and adoption process could potentially have led to some participants becoming distressed in the interview process, as these subjects are highly personal and sensitive to individuals. It was important for me then, as an ethical researcher, to be mindful of West (2002) and West and Byrne's (2009) concerns regarding the sensitive nature of qualitative research, by making sure I was sensitive to the participant's interview process before, during and after, and revisiting to 'check for' accuracy of data and the participants' welfare. This was supported through my practicing as a psychotherapist, being conscious of potential distress and therefore competent to facilitate the participants if they became distressed, and to make appropriate referrals if needed. Participants, in the initial process of informed consent, were also made aware of an independent health care practitioner (in their local area) that they could contact if they needed to for extra support. In respects to the adoptee's vulnerability in general, and especially in respect to vulnerability of disclosing sexuality, the ethics committee deemed it necessary for the participants to be over 25 years, as opposed to the normal age of 18 years for adult consent. This was agreed by the primary researcher, in-line with the ethics committee that a 25-year-old adult would be potentially more mature and sufficiently grounded in experience than, perhaps, an 18-year-old, to discuss

and take self-responsibility, in respects to the sensitivity of the subject area of sexuality and self-identity.

Regarding my own self-care as the researcher and as a participant, I was mindful of using my own support networks to facilitate any concerns, distress or difficulties that arose for me throughout the research project. This was especially important during the heuristic and auto-ethnographic process, as these two areas were highly personal and subjective, moving into my personal world of adoption and sexuality. I therefore made use of my own clinical supervision and research supervision to facilitate my self-care. Having been through a deep heuristic process in my counselling training, I was aware of my own processes and how best to support this. A major issue did arise for me in the first year of my research, involving the death of my birth mother. I explore this in chapter 4, using the auto-ethnographic and reflexive process, to show, explore and explain my pain and devastation of losing her not only once, as a baby, but then again as an adult. West (2002) raises an interesting point regarding publication of qualitative research, especially ‘giving public voice’ to participants, and the researcher; questioning the healthiness of the public process of disclosure. Again, this raises concerns with the idea of ‘informed consent’ and if we as researchers can ever truly achieve this (Etherington, 2000, 2004; West, 2002; West & Byrne, 2009). For me, as a professional and ethical person, the belief is in the striving and desire ‘for’. If we strive to uphold ethical practice/research (BACP, 2016; Bond, 2004), and fundamentally and professionally position ourselves in this way, then we have a ‘good’ starting point to uphold ‘non-maleficence’, and to create ‘beneficence’, within a relational process.

### **3.3 Postmodern Perspective**

The aim of this research study was to gain access to, gather, and then represent, adult adoptees’ personal narratives/stories around the subject of their sexuality, their sexual

identity and their adoption. Through this process, Kinchloe and Berry's (2004) 'bricolage methodology' was established to facilitate the 'voicing' of adult adoptee's individual narratives of sexuality, to honour both the individual particulars of 'lived experience' (Moustakas, 1990; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), and also highlight the shared thematic qualities of adult adoptees' sexuality, hence coalescing idiosyncratic knowledge and general knowledge (Finlay, 2009; Moustakas, 1990; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

To achieve this aim, I thus position and place the research study accordingly within a *postmodern paradigm* (Derrida, 1978, 1981; Foucault, 1980; Hansen, 2015; Lyotard, 1984; Rosenau, 1992):

*where the modern conception of knowledge as a mirror of reality is replaced by a [postmodern] conception of the social construction of reality, where the focus is on the interpretation and negotiation of the meanings of the social world* (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.52).

I stand counter to the 'traditional modernist scientific paradigm', if modernism is aligned to an objective worldview of an ordered universe that can be measured and understood, being ruled by mathematical laws that can eventually be uncovered by science to reveal the 'truth' (Dyer, 2006; Madill & Gough, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1992). This 'truth' or 'objective reality' which we are reputed to be able to uncover in the human sciences, is searched for predominantly through evidenced based practice, incorporating outcome measures in the procedure of randomised control trials, which are the accepted and often unchallenged 'gold standard' for clinical research (Cartwright, 2007; Dyer & Joseph, 2006; Bower, 2010; Ramey & Grubb, 2009).

Lincoln & Guba (2000) raise warning toward the modernist stance:

*There are two dangers in the conventional texts of scientific method: that they may lead us to believe the world is rather simpler than it is, and that they may re-inscribe enduring forms of historical oppression.* (p.184).

If this is the case, then the *postmodern perspective* offers a challenging paradigm to existing foundationalism/modernism, through the deconstruction of taken-for-granted conventions (Derrida, 1978; 1981), whilst raising questions toward power and knowledge (Foucault, 1976, 1980), and confronting hegemonic epistemological and ontological ‘ways of being’ (Glynn, 2015; Messner & Jordan, 2015; Powers, 2011; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). Therefore, through the postmodern perspective, we can highlight inherent forms of oppression and discrimination that exist, due to modernist ideas, and help to emancipate the disenfranchised groups that are excluded. Taking the above into consideration, and given my background and political leanings (see chapter 4 and section 7.7, where I fully explicate and present these), my therapeutic stance and philosophical stance (see sections 1.3, 3.3, 7.7), and my alliance toward the emancipatory means of research (see sections 1.3, chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6) –one can see the emergence of a postmodern perspective, especially in relation to Lincoln & Guba’s (2000) previous warning against modernist ideas and potential forms of oppression. This then presents the possibility for ‘meaning’ to be reconstructed as per Kvale & Brinkman’s (2009) previous point. If this is the case, then social policy can also be reconstructed for the benefit and support of marginalised and disenfranchised groups, giving them a ‘voice’ (see chapters 4, 5, 6), and presenting new forms of knowledge for policy makers and health care practitioners to learn from and implement. Again, this clearly links and aligns now with the concept of using the ‘bricolage methodology’, as I explicate below in sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

### **3.3.1 The Postmodern Bricolage**

If we move this *postmodern perspective* into the realms of methodological choice, we find the attractiveness and creativity that is fostered through the complexity and multiplicity of the ‘bricoleur’ as researcher, who in turn creates a bricolage (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Sims, 2015).

Kincheloe & Berry (2004) claim:

*[T]he bricolage highlights the relationship between a researcher's ways of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history. Appreciating research as a power-driven act, the researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality...and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge...The bricolage exists out of respect for the complexity of the lived world. Indeed, it is grounded on an epistemology of complexity. (p.87)*

Given the complexity of the lived experience of humans within their socio-political worlds, the bricolage seems conducive and appropriate as a methodology to assist in the presenting and interpretation of participants within a social world. Sims (2015) states:

*The bricoleur is...not restrained or constrained by strict prescribed methodological criteria, as the bricoleur understands that knowledge is a human construction in all areas of research, and is open to interpretation. (p.79)*

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.4) have posed the image of the researcher as 'quilt maker'. (p.79). Therefore, through the process of this research, I have created, with my fellow 'participants' (the other adult adoptees), a *bricolage*, therefore a mixed tapestry of metaphor and meaning, weaving personal lived experience and knowledge, incorporating our skills and ability to adapt and create *a new*, with the resources available to us.

### **3.3.2 The Bricolage used in this Thesis**

In Sims (2015), I argued, and presented a paper on the methodological advantages and inclusivity of the bricolage as a methodology in its own right. The focus and underpinning philosophy behind this claim was supported through the postmodern ontological and epistemological perspective. In the USA, the Bricolage is accepted and adopted as a methodology in its own right (Berry, 2004; Kinchloe and Berry, 2004; Kincheloe, McLaren,

& Steinberg, 2011). My proposed dialogue was grounded in the multi-perspective and the multi-layered and contextual positioning of the individual in the world, consisting of multi-viewpoints as opposed to mono-viewpoints. Therefore, the bricolage offers a philosophical and methodological stance founded in difference and diversity.

It has been suggested and argued that bricolage has no structure, is a 'hotchpotch' of research methods thrown together, lacks linear empirical formats, and scientific rigour (Berry, 2011; Kinchloe & Berry, 2004; Kinchloe, 2001, 2004; Rogers, 2012). Yet the qualitative researcher as 'bricoleur', the creator of the bricolage, is introduced and substantiated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 2005, 2011) in their opening chapter in the second and third editions, and the most current fourth edition of the 'Handbook of Qualitative Research' (notably the first destination for qualitative researchers). They even claim that, '*Qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus*' (2000, p.5).

In the UK, McLeod (2001) devotes a chapter to 'Qualitative Inquiry as Bricolage', complimenting and developing Denzin and Lincoln's concept of the 'bricoleur' to the subject and research of counselling and psychotherapy. However, in his latest edition of 'Qualitative research in counselling and psychotherapy' (2011), this chapter is omitted with more focus on commercially established methodologies, for example '*grounded theory and its variants*' (p. 144). A reason for this, as McLeod (2001) states in the first edition, '*The notion of the researcher-as-bricoleur has so far had little impact on the world of qualitative researchers in the field of counselling and psychotherapy.*' (p.128). If one reads the BACP CPR (Counselling & Psychotherapy research journal) in the last ten years, McLeod's claim holds true, with very limited mention of bricolage or bricoleur as researcher. However, this does raise a question as to why? And one that I explore in Sims (2015) *Multiple lenses of therapy research: the paradox of bricolage*.

For the basis of this thesis, I have adopted and used Kinchloe and Berry's (2004) methodological Bricolage. Berry (2004) states:



*Bricolage has structure. One of the major features...is that there are no methods or procedures to constructing knowledge through the bricolage as research. That does not mean, however, that doing the bricolage is without structure. The structure of bricolage works inwardly, playfully, complexly and rigorously.* (p.101)

Due to the ‘plurality of structures’ within the bricolage, Berry (2004) claims, ‘*it is possible to select from a host of structures*’ (p.106). If we refer this back to my ‘Positioning of the Researcher’ (See **section 1.3**), you will see a multiplicity of being within how I present myself: i.e., my identity, my sexuality, my therapeutic practice, and the roles I adopt and incorporate throughout my life. For example, father, husband, therapist, lecturer, friend, etc. Therefore, different structural formats exist within my very being.

The diversity of being that exists within me (and arguably within us all) is incorporated and used as ‘access points’ and points of reference, to assist structuring, analysis, and discussion of the research. Kinchloe and Berry’s (2004) formalised theoretical concept for this is called the ‘POET’, the point of entry text. The subject of sexuality, for example, is a POET for this thesis through me, the participants, the secondary literature, theory, politics, social justice, diversity, discrimination, critical theory, sociology and methodologies.

The choice of methodologies used, and incorporated into this thesis reflect and compliment the relevant concordant and discordant aspects of diversity within the researcher. These also reflect and are then appropriately incorporated into the research process again as a ‘point of entry text’ (POETs) to establish idiographic and consensus knowledge i.e., the use of auto-ethnography (see **section 3.4**), heuristic inquiry (see **section 3.5**), and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (see **section 3.6**). These methods assist the establishing, destabilising, and critical analysis of the subject of adoptee’s sexuality from multiple viewpoints.

Relating this to the research aims (see **section 3.3.3 below**):

1. Auto-ethnography gives me, the researcher, a voice and opportunity to include my story of adoptee's sexuality, which is important and vital to enhance my ownership of the research, give a sense of personal power, and also as a 'POET', reference point of shared comparative experience.
2. Heuristic inquiry, in essence, is the research study, as the process of personal immersion in the subject of adoptee sexuality has been with me all my life. This process of analysis with an illustrative/representative 'individual depiction' (Moustakas, 1990, p.51) of the participant, allows a 'relational' cooperative process between the researcher and the participants. This gives the reader an opening to the participants' stories of adoptee's sexuality. Again, this is important and vital to enhance the diversity of the research, give voice to the participants, and also as a 'POET', reference point of shared comparative experience. The final 'creative synthesis' (p.52) permits and involves 'the researcher' finding and creating the universal portrayal of the research question and experience.
3. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), according to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), '*essence...lies in its analytical focus*' and how this, '*directs...analytical attention toward...participants' attempts to make sense of their experience*' (p.79). The use of IPA was an attempt to show how the participant understands and 'makes sense' of their sexuality as an adoptee. This analytical application permits the researcher to use a formalised process of coded thematic analysis, which moves from the idiographic to the shared coalescing of data across cases. This, therefore, gives the reader an opening to the participants' 'sense making' of their adoptee's sexuality from the IPA process of analysis. Again, this is important and vital to enhance the diversity of the research, give

voice to the participants, and also as a ‘POET’, reference point of shared comparative experience.

### **3.3.3 Overview description of research aims and methods used**

The aims of this research are: 1) To gain access to, and gather, adult adoptee’s personal narratives/stories around the subject of their sexuality, their sexual identity and their adoption; 2) To give ‘voice’ to adult adoptees around the subject of sexuality and adoption; and 3) To represent, and then present, these narratives/stories, honouring both the individual particulars of ‘lived experience’, and also to highlight any shared thematic qualities of the participants.

To achieve these aims the research design was structured and underpinned in qualitative methods (in line with the postmodern bricolage); reflexive auto-ethnographic methods were used for the researcher’s narrative, and semi-structured interviews were used to gather the participants’ data. Therefore, the findings are structured and presented in three stages; stage one: Auto-ethnography (see **Chapter 4**), stage two: Heuristic inquiry (see **chapter 5**), and stage three: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (see **Chapter 6**).

## **3.4 Stage One: Auto-ethnography**

*Back and forth autoethnographers gaze first through ethnographic wide-angle lens focusing outward on social cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.739)*

The process of auto-ethnography is a deep reflexivity and careful self-reflection; a process whereby the researcher takes a ‘snapshot’ of their lived experience and shows,

demonstrates and critiques, the intersections between the 'self, society, the particular, the general, and the personal and political' (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015; Muncey, 2010).

This method of research came about, and is in line with, the postmodern perspective. Where the crisis of representation called into question the modernist methods of 'universal truth', which refused to acknowledge the 'particular', especially in relation to disenfranchised groups and social identities (e.g. class, race, sexuality and gender) reinforcing oppressive forms of discrimination, colonialism and invasive ethnographic methods (Adam, Jones & Ellis, 2015).

The process and creativity within auto-ethnography is wide and varied. It is essentially a process of writing, although this representation has been taken into other forms of presentation, for example, dance, performance, sound and art (see Jones, Adam & Ellis, 2013). I have taken an experience in my life and have thrown into question the possible social constructs, values, beliefs, culturally and personally, that influenced my understanding and development of (an adoptee's) sexuality; critiquing and presenting my 'look' into self and society.

McLeod (2011) does raise concerns with auto-ethnography, arguing that it blurs the genres across fact and fiction, confusing scientific research with the novel and performance art. He also has concerns with auto-ethnography being an 'extension of personal development', therefore not actually contributing to a '*shared professional body of knowledge*' (p. 216). There are also other concerns and challenges raised against auto-ethnography: the researcher is being self-indulgent, narcissistic, too aesthetic and emotional (Ellis, 2009; hooks, 1994; Keller, 1995).

McIlveen (2008) goes some way to counter the above arguments, proposing that readers of auto-ethnographic accounts must understand, and agree, the limitations and creative representation that a single auto-ethnographic analysis has. He also claims that there is no rightful purchase on generalisability; although recognising that it can have the potential

to act as a provocation for deep understanding of a single case, and therefore acting as a stimulus to ‘*open new intellectual vistas for the reader*’ (p. 5) through idiographic meaning and empathy.

If this is the case, then a therapeutic stance can be taken toward the Self through the curative nature of ‘*writing about aspects of our lives become[s] a healing endeavour*’ (Etherington, 2004, p.145). The strengthening of our connections to our ‘body, mind and spirit’ and the ‘newly discovered self-knowledge’, through the auto-ethnographic experience, is apparent, and can be profound (Bolton, 2014; Bolton *et al*, 2003; Etherington, 2003, 2004; Hunt, 2000); although this does support McLeod’s (2011) concern of auto-ethnography being an ‘extension of personal development’.

However, when addressing auto-ethnography from an ontological perspective, regarding the criticisms of auto-ethnography’s validity claims, McIlveen (2008) suggests the solution to the problem rests ‘*within the assumptions of the particular paradigm and adherence to the standards*’ (p. 5) and criteria of that proposed paradigm, especially for the quality set out by Morrow (2005) (see **section 3.6**).

### **3.5 Stage Two: Heuristic Inquiry**

*Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or a problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social – and perhaps universal – significance.*  
(Moustakas, 1990, p.15)

The heuristic journey and process, is, and started as an inherently implicit one within this research study. It began back in my early years and has been with me most of my life (see

**section 1.3**). My relationships to the subjects of adoption and sexuality have been, and are still, the ‘challenge and puzzlement’ to my understanding of self and experience. This naturally led me into the heuristic process of therapy training and qualifying as a person-centred therapist. O’Hara (1986) suggests that person-centred therapy, ‘*is itself, a heuristic investigation into the nature and meaning of human experience*’ (p.174). I have experienced person-centred therapy and can confess that my process of self-discovery was implicitly heuristic in nature, leading to my awareness and acknowledgement of my suppressed and oppressed sexuality.

Barrineau and Bozarth (1989) also infer:

*the difference between [person-centred] therapy and heuristic research...is a moot point.*

*The model, for therapy, promotes the actualizing tendency. The model, for research, promotes the same process that includes, for the participants, clarity of discourse.* (cited in Moustakas, 1990, p.104).

Therefore, heuristic inquiry and the explicit incorporation of heuristic analysis was an appropriate and necessary ‘point of entry text’ (POET) (see **section 3.3.2**) for the bricolage. The explicit analysis of Moustakas’ heuristics (1990) is based within six phases:

1. Initial engagement –connecting to the topic and contacting the participants;
2. Immersion – interviewing, transcribing and listening;
3. Incubation – creating space to allow themes and understanding to create and unfold;
4. Illumination – the development of insights, highlighted areas, structures and themes come to the fore;
5. Explication – making sense of the material and expressing it;
6. Creative Synthesis – synthesing and integrating all the data into the overarching representation of the study, usually taking the form of a narrative depiction using verbatim material and examples.

However, West (2001) does remind us that:

*although heuristic research does move through these phases, it is not necessarily a linear process and certainly does not constitute a rigid framework (p.128).*

Therefore, Chapter 5 of the thesis incorporates and presents the ‘individual depictions’ of the participants, where the first five phases of Moustakas’ heuristic process was established to represent the subjectivity of each participant and their story. Chapter 5 also incorporates the ‘composite group depiction’ and the final phase of ‘creative synthesis’, respectfully thus concluding Moustakas’ heuristic analysis at this point in the research. Although this analytical representation is a heuristic inquiry at this stage of the findings; it could be argued that there is an implicit inclusion of all analytical processes (inclusive of IPA and auto-ethnography) that encompasses the inherent heuristic process within the bricolage used in this thesis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Etherington, 2004; McLeod, 2000; West, 2001).

Djuraskovic and Arthur (2010), however, do raise some concerns with heuristic inquiry relating to subjectivity and objectivity within the research process. They claim that researcher bias, lack of generalisability due to small participant numbers, and a need to be grounded in the heuristic ‘*philosophical roots*’ (p.1583) are possible limitations to this methodology. West (2001), however, offers and outlines the distinctions and rationales for the basis of objectivity and subjectivity, comparing ‘grounded theory to heuristic inquiry’, which underpin Djutaskovic and Arthur’s (2010) concerns. West (2001) therefore presents a comparison and overview, allowing the reader to digest and develop understanding around these concepts.

Finally, when relating this to the bricolage, I take my lead from West (2001):

*The report of an heuristic research study may well resemble what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) called a bricolage....This perspective is a response to a realisation that human reality cannot be objectively known, but only be represented...Their approach advocates harnessing the diversity of world views explored by differing methodologies. (p. 130)*

### 3.6 Stage Three: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

*Experiencing is itself tantalizing and elusive. In a sense, pure experience is never accessible; we witness it after the event. Therefore...IPA has a model of a person as a sense making creature, the meaning which is bestowed by the participant on experience, as it becomes an experience, can be said to represent the experience itself... Thus IPA is concerned with human lived experience, and posits that experience can be understood via an examination of the meanings which people impress upon it. These meanings, in turn, may illuminate the embodied, cognitive-affective and existential domains of psychology (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.34).*

The theoretical and philosophical foundational basis for IPA is from three main areas within the social sciences: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology is grounded in the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Satre, and describes the “what” and “how” of a person’s experience, developing descriptions of the essences of ‘lived experience’; the focus is on description as opposed to analysis of experiences (Van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation, originally an interpretation of biblical texts, gradually moving into the broader context of literary and historical works. Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer are key figures in the social sciences, using techniques that divulge the intentions and context of the speaker/writer (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, idiography relates to the ‘particular’, the particular of a single case study and also the particular of several case studies within a context of a subject area, thus standing counter to psychological studies that focus on the nomothetic (generalising group phenomena) (Smith et al., 2009). An example of the two aspects of particular is this thesis, focusing on adoptee’s sexuality - the particular individual lived experience of a participant, and the particular shared qualities of the participants as a contextual group.



The collection of data for IPA tends to be, predominately, from interviewing, either through a semi-structured or unstructured process. For analysis, the interviews are transcribed and then a process of coding is applied to create and highlight meaning units. The process of ‘phenomenological bracketing’ is applied through this process, to counter the researcher’s potential biases; although West (2009) and others have argued similarly, the actuality of this experience of bracketing being an absolute impossibility, with the researcher always bringing aspects of their influence into this process.

The next step, once the meaning units have been recognised, is then placing these meaning units within a process of identifying superordinate and subordinate themes, underpinned by the research question. Presentation of the themes can then be in a table or graphically, with an accompanying narrative relating to the idiographic material and, if looking across cases, the shared thematic themes of the subject group (Smith et al., 2009). This process represents the identified connections, contradictions, patterns, and themes from the participants’ responses, and how the researcher has interpretatively analysed them (see **chapter 6**). When relating this to the research aims of this thesis, the IPA process and analysis represents and gives ‘voice’ to adult adoptee’s around the subject of their sexuality and adoption, honouring their lived experience and acknowledging that the researcher plays an active role in interpretative data analysis.

### **3.7 Selecting Interviewees**

The selection of the ten interviewees consisted of contacting members from the adoption community that I belong to. I belong to two ‘Facebook groups’<sup>16</sup> which has two closed social support groups for adult adoptees, only accessible by invitation. These sites

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<sup>16</sup> Facebook is a social networking website, that was founded and launched on February 4, 2004, by [Mark Zuckerberg](#) with his [Harvard College](#) roommates [Eduardo Saverin](#), [Andrew McCollum](#), [Dustin Moskovitz](#) and [Chris Hughes](#). It is now a multi-national conglomerate organisation and business. See [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

are only open to UK residents. The monitoring of the sites is on a regular daily basis by the administrators for the groups. You must be invited to the groups and then accepted or declined by the administration members. Any information and posts on the sites are only able to be seen by invited members. The sites are also monitored regularly by Facebook administration, adhering to equality and diversity policies and non-discriminatory behaviour. The groups currently have a total of over a thousand members in each group.

An advert was posted on the forum groups, explaining the research, with a contact email for prospective participants to contact the researcher. The participant criteria were: UK residents only; adult adoptees of any gender orientation or identity; fluent in written and verbal English; aged over 25 years; and feeling sufficiently grounded in their experience to be able to participate safely. The criteria were agreed and developed in line with the research aims and to meet ethical practice (see **section 3.1& 3.3.2**). The reason to state 25 years and over, as opposed to 18 years (which is the standard age criteria in the UK for an adult), was deemed, through the ethics committee's criteria, that a 25-year-old adult would be potentially more mature and sufficiently grounded in experience than perhaps an 18-year-old, due to the sensitivity of the subject area of sexuality and self-identity.

After initial email contact with the participant, the participant was contacted by telephone to arrange the interview. The participant was then emailed an information sheet (see **Appendix 1**) explaining the process of the interview, the limits of confidentiality, the process of data analysis, and five sub-questions acting as thematic prompts (see **Table 2**) to assist and start a reflexive process in the participant.

### **3.7.1 The Interview Process**

The process of interviewing was used as a method, to gain access to and gather adult adoptee's personal narratives/stories around the subject of their sexuality, their

sexual identity and their adoption. The five sub-questions (see **Table 2**) acted as an initial reflexive stimulus, and then as guiding prompts for the interview.

**Table 2 - 5 sub-questions for interview**

5 Sub-questions
<i>How do you understand your sexuality?</i>
<i>What does your sexuality mean to you?</i>
<i>Is your self-identity connected to your sexuality?</i>
<i>Do you see any correlation between being adopted and your sexuality?</i>
<i>Is there anything else you might want to say? Possibly about your adoptive process.</i>

Coming from a person-centred/relational perspective in my therapeutic work, it felt a natural process to facilitate the interviewee in this way, although there was a greater focus on a *conversational dialogical process*, which Moustakas (1990) claims, ‘*involves cooperative sharing in which co-researchers and primary researchers open pathways to each other*’ (p.47), with an emphasis on self-expression, disclosure and revealing of the phenomena being researched. After the interview had been transcribed, the participant was sent a copy of the interview transcript to check for accuracy, and for any changes or deletions the participant wished to make.

Participant Cathy was the only participant to make changes and deleted the conversation where she had explicitly talked about personal sexual acts.

### 3.7.2 The experience of being interviewed

Embracing the inter-subjective relationship between the researcher and participant in interviewing, ‘*There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other,*’ says Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 138); as researcher and participant intermingle in ‘*pre-analytic participation*’ (1968, p. 203), each touches and impacts on the other. This explicitly relational approach to collecting research data is seen to emerge out of the researcher/participant relationship, and is understood to be co-created in the embodied dialogical encounter (Finlay, 2009).

A vivid and emerging process that demonstrates this dialogical approach is seen through the account of participant Marty and our interview (see **Table 3**):

**Table 3 - Marty's interview process**

Interview process	
<b>Interviewer</b>	That deeper understanding to make sense maybe or why we experience what we experience
<b>Marty</b>	Hmmmmmm. What it made me think about first and foremost was you have in some religious and spiritual traditions, you have icons, saints
<b>Interviewer</b>	Yes saints yeah
<b>Marty</b>	And you're supposed to kind of focus on the icon in a kind of connect with the bigger thing behind it God. So is that what happened with the older woman, if the older woman is an icon like the mother, by not addressing the mother everything else is, it becomes spiritual
<b>Interviewer</b>	It becomes the divine feminine.
<b>Marty</b>	Yeah yeah that's what I think. I am asking myself. Asking for some divine fantasy?
<b>Interviewer</b>	The need to just be at one with it. To connect with it, to know it?
<b>Marty</b>	Yeah. Yeah I'm kind of like that's interesting to be at one with it, hmmm but yeah would she be what we want her to be, or is it...you get so close actually you find out that she has her own sort of conditions and thinking.

<b>Interviewer</b>	Hmmmm, the conditional divine mother that we are lost to...
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Through this ‘snapshot’ of our dialogue in Table 3, we see a dialogical and co-created process unfolding, relating to our understanding and sense making of our relationship to our mothers. In this co-created ‘meaning making’, we are sharing and co-creating symbolic representation of our relinquishment and adoption, and how this has presented itself in our lives through our shared sexual attraction to older women (continued in Table 4).

**Table 4 - Marty's interview cont...**

Interview contin...	
<b>Marty</b>	And sort of the divine feminine is also quite stern you know; she has standards. I remember doing a workshop once that was around rebirthing. It kind of took me right back to my birth and some of those early powers of my life. The facilitator was an older woman. I was feeling so horny for her. I had this sense that I'd got in touch with this essential feminine this divine feminine within and yet something made me feel incredibly powerfully attracted to this woman, but we couldn't have sex, we couldn't make love, we couldn't do anything with that.
<b>Interviewer</b>	It was just there
<b>Marty</b>	It was just there it was like that sense of society was saying you can't. That's not what you do with this divine feminine. You need it but that's not what you do with it. That would've been in aberration in a way.
<b>Interviewer</b>	Transgression, we must not overstep the boundary.
<b>Marty</b>	So, it's like the divine feminine is in our world view of our experience. This beautiful nurturing all-encompassing energy but actually they're still boundaries there.

This process was also shared and related through the other participants. Participant Pan questioned his understanding regarding his need to take the ‘*path of least*

*resistance*’, which made me question my own ability to conform and adapt for acceptance and fear of rejection. Participant Cathy was thankful for the interview space to finally make the time to get in-touch with her *‘repressed and denied sexuality’*, allowing an opportunity to share her experience, making the initial step to connect with her *‘sexual self’*.

McLeod (2011) claims, *‘The act of making testimony is a fundamental human need.’* (p.217); this was found through the interview process with the participants. Participant Kim, Participant Noel and I, all felt the interview process had given us a moment in time to ‘voice’ and re-evaluate our adoption journey, and how that now related to our current relationships. Participant Eva was encouraging and supportive of the research endeavour, saying, *‘this area of adoption is well overdue, especially for lesbians and gay people’*, being thankful for the opportunity to be heard. This was also expressed by Participant David and Participant Sam after the interview; although questions were raised when they were both contacted to ‘check their transcripts’ a few weeks later, both expressed a need to move on, and didn’t feel the need to check, being happy with our initial process. This does confirm Riessman (2008) who highlights the possible illusions, to ‘giving voice’ to marginalised research groups with the need of the participants to feel connected and heard. She claims researchers can often be disillusioned on the *‘healing power of storytelling’* (p.199), warning us that emancipatory intentions are no assurance of emancipatory effects.

However, overall the general consensus felt that the interview experience had given them an opportunity to reflect and consider the subject of their sexuality as an adult adoptee.

### **3.8 Validity & Trustworthiness**

Morrow (2005), when referring to trustworthiness in qualitative research, claims, *‘Criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research are closely tied to the paradigmatic underpinnings of the particular discipline in which a particular investigation is conducted’* (p.251), thus suggesting that the mode of validity claims for qualitative research is a philosophical

process housed in the qualitative school the researcher belongs to. This is further supported by Lincoln & Guba (2000) who infer, *'truth – and any agreement regarding what is valid knowledge – arises from the relationship between members of some stake-holding community.'* (p.177)

Therefore, by placing and positioning this study within a postmodern paradigm, it would seem 'just' that the validity claims and trustworthiness of the research design, methodological choices, and ethical practices of this research study meet and uphold the criteria relevant to the postmodern paradigm. Rahman and Jackson (2010,) present some basic tenets of postmodernism:

- ❖ *Language does not simply 'transmit' thoughts or meaning; rather thought and meaning are 'constructed through' language. Meaning is relational, forever changing and contextual – discourses in Foucault's terms.*
- ❖ *There is no essential self that exists outside language and culture. Our identities are products of the ways in which we are positioned by language and discourse, as in Foucault's account of the homosexual. Subjectivity is fluid and fragmented.*
- ❖ *Objective 'truth' is impossible – knowledge is discursively produced from particular social locations. Knowledges and discourses, and the language through which they are constituted, can be deconstructed – taken apart – so as to reveal that they are not universal truths but constructions, therefore, a rejection of grand theoretical 'metanarratives' like Marxism.* (p.125)

Lincoln & Guba (2000) present three validity checks for qualitative research in this paradigm:

- Validity as authenticity, i.e., *'ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity'*. (p.180) - this is met through my research design, methods chosen, and the change process in the participants (see **sections 3.3.2; 3.3.3; 3.7.2 & chapter 5**).

- Validity as resistance, *'help writers and reader...see the interweaving of processes in the research discovery, seeing, telling, storying, re-presentation'; to disrupt and subvert the status quo leading us 'to uncover the hidden assumptions and life-denying repressions'.* (p.181) – this can be viewed and is demonstrated in **chapter 2** and **chapter 4**, where forms of oppression and discrimination are discussed within the UK relating to adoption and sexuality.
- Validity as an ethical relationship (p.182): 1. Positionality - see **section 1.3** positioning of the researcher and **section 3.1** positioning of the study; 2. Specific discourse communities and research sites as arbiters of quality - see **section 3.7.1** for participants to check accuracy and agency regarding their interview process; 3. Voice - see **chapter 5**, participants' narratives and representation; 4. Critical subjectivity/ intense self-reflexivity - see **section 1.3** and **chapter 4**, researcher positioning and auto-ethnography; 5. Reciprocity - or the extent to which the research relationship becomes reciprocal rather than hierarchical – see **sections 3.2, 3.7.1, 3.7.2**.

Clandinin (2013, p. 35), however coming from a more pragmatic stance, questions the very notion of validity in postmodern times and poses three alternate justifications that should underpin qualitative research: 1. ***Personal Justifications:*** i.e., researcher history, story and experience – the researcher as an adoptee with a life story of sexuality to tell. 2. ***Practical Justifications:*** i.e., how is the research going to inform practice? By looking at the adoption process and development of an adoptee's sexuality; relating this to their experience and needs as a developing adoptee within the family unit, school, relating to others, support needs, and ways to create a holistic support network for the adoptee. Therefore, raising the question: Is there a need for specialist support around the adoptee's developing sexuality? 3. ***Social Justifications:*** Will new theoretical insight come from this inquiry? Do the adoptees experience certain moments in their lives that affect developing sexuality and identity? Does the support and understanding of the adoption family determine and affect sexual identity and developing sexuality? How are these



questions and experiences also related to personality theories e.g. Rogers, (1959)? If the above questions have an influence on developing sexuality and sexual identity, this could/will inform professional and supportive practice, as well as informing the social action needed to take to reassess the adoptee's development and support. This in turn could affect policies in respect to social work, placement of older children and adolescents, and support of professionals e.g. psychotherapists, and the practical needs of the adoptee.

However, we, as researchers, validate, be trustworthy, or justify our research, hopefully this demonstrates that the researcher has openly considered validity claims and been trustworthy in relation to this research study.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter has emphasised the philosophical positioning of the research study, methodological choices, data methods used, and the ethical and valid processes/practices that were applied to this study. The following chapters four, five and six will show the data analysis findings from the three stages of research.

## Chapter 4: Stage one Auto-ethnography

### 4.1 Introduction

*Postmodern representations search out and experiment with narratives that expand the range of understanding, voice, and the storied variations in human experience. As much as they are social scientists, inquirers also become storytellers, poets, and playwrights, experimenting with personal narratives, first-person accounts, reflexive interrogations, and deconstruction of the forms of tyranny embedded in representational practices.*

(Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.184)

In this chapter, I will take a moment from my history, showing the reader an aspect of my life, the sexual and social experiences, personal and social relationships, and the socio-political structures that have played a part in my development as an adult adoptee. This will be represented through the methodology of auto-ethnography, a method that emerged through, and embraces the multiplicity and creativity of, the postmodern perspective (see **section 3.4**); and as Lincoln and Guba (2000) state above, I will be embracing and using the methods and forms akin to this methodology and paradigm.

My preferred 'point of entry of the text' (POET), the bricolage's methodological access point to analysis and discussion (see **section 3.3.2**), is through the subjects of sexuality, class and gender. These subjects sociologically, psychologically and ideologically have shaped my experience through the relationships in my life. I have chosen to interweave analysis and discussion in this auto-ethnographic account for three reasons. The first is to show lived experience, and to simultaneously critique and discuss the relevant socio-political constructs and ideologies that have influenced my life. Taken from 'Queer theory'<sup>17</sup>, this approach is to assist the reader's understanding/awareness, but also to simultaneously challenge their social constructs, values and beliefs. The second reason is to compliment Tony Adams' (2011) auto-

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<sup>17</sup> Queer theory: 'Is a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire'. (Spargo, 1999, p.8). It critiques socio-political power structures and oppressive 'normalising' discourses. (See Butler, 1990; Gamson, 2000; Spargo, 1999)

ethnography ‘narrating the closet’, where he uses the same approach to analysis and discussion, which I found enlivening, educational and challenging.

This is also found in Muncey (2010) where she presents and advocates an ‘analytical auto-ethnography’, similar to ‘queer theory’ with a focus on improving and creating theoretical understanding of a phenomenon. Therefore, the reasoning behind including academic critique and referencing is to make direct connections to the auto-ethnographic account in the moment of reading and experiencing, to open vistas to wider thought and discussion. Adams, Jones and Ellis (2015) also advocate and present, different forms of auto-ethnographic presentation, including ‘conceptualism’. This form takes a critical representation including analysis and discussion: ‘*which foreground overt critiques of cultural identities, experiences, practices and cultural systems*’ (p.89).

The final reason is to demonstrate and to give the reader ‘a flavour’ of some of the directions, or ‘POETs’, that my discussion will take when I move into chapter 7, where I bring aspects of the auto-ethnographic account and the participants’ findings to develop and create the thesis.

## **4.2 Auto-ethnographic – Mike**

### **4.2.1 Setting the stage**

Before embarking on research and academia, a great passion and profession of mine was theatre and performance. I worked for many years as a professional actor/singer in the UK and Australia, mainly in musical theatre and Opera. A contextual and metaphorical image I am then employing and structuring the auto-ethnographic account is that of the actor, playwright, and play. To disregard this aspect of self would seem somewhat disingenuous, and given Ervin Goffman’s<sup>18</sup> (1959) sociological theory of self as the social actor, and Judith

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<sup>18</sup> Goffman’s (1959) concept of the ‘Self’, as socially positioned, is as an embedded cultural actor - the Self and the social world within which it inhabits are inseparable and intertwined, as taken from

Butler's<sup>19</sup> (1990) gender performativity theory, of which I theoretical align, it seems more than apt and appropriate to weave this metaphor throughout. The stage is a place where actions come to life, where stories get told, and people can change forever. Stakes are raised in the drama of the play, plots thicken, and the tensions rise within the hearts of the players. A life can be lost and regained in a single breath, identities forged and found, and challenges faced and overcome in an instant; and as our darling Mr Wilde always said, '*Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.*' (Ellmann, 1987)

### 4.2.2 A Reflexive Turn

When I first think of reflexivity, I'm reminded of the song by the 90's Indie Band Oasis 'Don't look back in anger' (1995). Will I look back in anger? It's the 1970's, a young boy is first discovering aspects of himself and trying to understand and experience his first sense of loss. A poem, he wrote, taken from my research journal (4<sup>th</sup> June, 2014):

#### A Little Bird Takes Flight

Where is my mum?

Where has she gone?

Why has she left me?

A little bird takes flight

I stand at the edge looking out onto the horizon

A little bird looking to take flight

---

his book, '*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*'. Goffman uses the imagery of theatre, which he refers to as the [dramaturgical model of social life](#). Therefore people in everyday life are likened to actors on a stage, each playing a variety of roles. The audience consists of others who observe the performer/person and react to the performances. Continuing the theatre metaphor, there is a front region where the actors are on stage in front of an audience, and a back region, or back stage, where individuals can be themselves and get rid of their role or identity that they play when they are in front of others. (see also Brickell, 2006a, 2006b)

<sup>19</sup> Judith Butler's (1990) theory of 'performativity' is similar to Goffman's 'self as cultural actor' - the main tenets of Butler's theory state that: your gender is constructed through your own repetitive performance of gender; self does not precede or is outside a gendered self; performativity of gender is a stylized repetition of acts, an imitation or miming of the dominant conventions of gender; biological sex is a social construction and gender subsumes sex; heteronormativity is a dominant discourse that can be challenged through performativity (i.e., 'drag' or non-conformist gender roles). (See also Brickell, 2005, 2006a, 2006b)

Where is my mum?	I feel anger, I feel rage
Why is she not here?	Why would she do this? Why would she
I look around, the sky is blue	leave me?
I can't see my mum, where is she?	Mum!
The breeze sweeps softly over my wings	Where are you?!
My heart starts to race, I open my wings	I cry, and I cry, and I cry, and I cry
Mum, is that you?	I miss you so much
No, it was someone else	Mum, don't leave me, don't go
Where is my mum...	It's too late, my mum has gone
I take a step forward feeling the earth	She has gone, I'm left alone, waiting, and
below me	waiting
I know now that my mum has gone, she	Waiting for my mum, but she has gone,
isn't coming back	and she's never coming back
I cry, and I cry, and I cry, and I cry	And so, it goes on
She is not coming back, I'm alone, alone	She never came back

This epitomises and captures my first understanding of being adopted through the present eyes of being an adult. It highlights the child's continual fear and abandonment, their profound realisation that for the first time in their existence they are pre-momentarily alone in a world, longing and hoping that their maternal home will reappear and bring calm to their crazed despairing feelings of angst. From the existential viewpoint, this highlights the individual's instantaneous moment of confrontation, as the realisation of their existence is exposed as unfixed and uncertain; they are immediately brought into experiencing 'angst' through an awareness of reality that is all too intolerable, alarming and terrifying (Spinelli, 2005; 2015; Wrathall & Murphy, 2013; Yalom, 1980). Of course, this is re-captured or re-created in the social reality of where I am constituted now, which does lead to questions and

criticisms of auto-ethnographic representations, including the limitations to factual memory and understanding of past events (Polkinghorne, 2005; Wilson & Dunn, 2004).

### **A Little Bird Takes Flight (cont...)**

I flapped my wings and I was gone  
Except I came back and when I did I found  
my mum  
She was old, and was sad; she was in pain  
for leaving her son  
She is still in pain; a torment that slowly  
kills  
She numbs her pain but it never goes  
She hurt herself when she left me  
She has never forgiven herself and never  
will  
She told me this, and the shame she feels as  
she looks me in the eyes  
The guilt she feels as it tears her up inside  
She left me and inflicted a wound deep  
within  
Her body screamed as I was taken away  
She numbed the pain  
I cried, and I cried, and I cried

I got angry but not anymore  
I love her you see  
I love my mum  
She did her best, the best she could  
I needed more, she could not give; I  
understand  
She is in torment of which I forgive  
I missed my mum all those years she was  
not there  
I missed my mum for all the things we  
never shared  
I missed my mum and still do to this day  
I mourn our lost years that we will never  
get again  
Every day, every year, every month I cry  
my tears  
I missed you mum; I missed your love  
I missed you mum  
The little bird has grown  
He is bigger now  
And that little bird?  
He lives on with every age...

My birth mother died 7 weeks after writing 'A little Bird Takes Flight'. She had been drinking alcohol heavily for over 30 years. When you are adopted as a child, you go through a process of mourning and loss, for the birth mother you never had and the birth family that was only an imagination in your mind (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Lifton, 1979, 2009; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009), and here I was again – losing my birth mother once more. I remember at the age of six suddenly becoming aware of feelings of anguish, severe sadness and melancholy. At the time I could not really understand or comprehend why I was feeling these severe emotions; it was a confusing period.

It was only after reading Brozinsky, Schechter & Henig (1992) that some understanding was formulated, and a realisation, an 'epiphany' came to me, as to why I was feeling those extreme emotions at six years of age, at such a young stage of my development. Brozinsky, Schechter & Henig (1992) confirmed that it is not until the ages of six to seven that the child begins to *'develop an internal mental representation of what he has lost... [taking] the form of thoughts, mental images, fantasies about his/[her] birth parents and [her]/his past'* (p.72). I remember many times lying on the family sofa in a melancholic state, falling to sleep and then waking with an image of a woman in my mind. I'd burst into tears and sob incessantly for 20 minutes, usually in the lap and arms of my adoptive mother. This continued for many years up until the age of eleven, but was soon frowned upon and culturally unacceptable for a working-class boy of that age in the 1980's to be showing outward signs of emotion; especially emotion that was deemed a representation of weakness in the eyes of the working-class men.

I now realise and have an understanding that those emotions were loss and grieving for my birth mother and birth family. What a sad little boy you were, Michael, solitary and misplaced in your world of loss and mourning. Verrier (2009) brings in a stark reality to the unresolved issues of loss for the adoptive child, *'the loss of the biological mother may be the precipitating factor which disposes adoptees to emotional disturbance'* (p.31). Due to my unresolved

issues of grief and loss, further troubles ensued compounding and conflating into desperate attempts to be understood and accepted; my teenage years were reckless and hell-bent exhibiting self-torturous behaviour and attitudes.

The child wanted to be accepted and understood within his own reality and the feelings and thoughts that accompanied. The social workers and careers were adamant that 'all' the child needed was a 'secure base'<sup>20</sup>. The safe haven constituted within the world, a place where he felt safe, confident and self-assured, but was this enough?

Verrier (2009) strongly impresses the need for people directly involved with the adoptive child to recognise the infant's grief and to validate their experiences. She states:

*That an adoptive child would grieve has not been adequately addressed in the literature.*

*Yet for a child, absence and death may amount to the same thing, and the memory of the loss of the original mother may be imprinted in her psyche and cells. (p.31)*

She further makes five cardinal rules which she deems essential for adoptive parents to consider and adhere to if they want to facilitate the wellbeing of the adopted child:

*1. Never threaten abandonment – the child expects this and will push and test for this.*

*Threatening abandonment only heightens the child's anxiety and engenders acting out;*

*2. Acknowledge your child's feelings – everyone has the right to their feelings and by validating feelings you are validating the child's sense of existence;*

*3. Allow your child to be herself – accept and value her uniqueness;*

*4. Adoptive mothers: don't try to take the place of the birth mother – you both are the child's mother but in different ways, both significant and real;*

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<sup>20</sup> Bowlby (2005) - attachment theory claims: A secure base is provided through a relationship with one or more sensitive and responsive attachment figures who meet the child's needs and to whom the child can turn as a safe haven, when upset or anxious. When children develop trust in the availability and reliability of this relationship, their anxiety is reduced and they can therefore explore and enjoy their world, safe in the knowledge that they can return to their secure base for help if needed. (see also Schofield & Beek, 2006; Schore, 1999; Stern, 1985)



*5. You cannot take away your child's pain – the child must own it and work it through in their own way, offer her empathy and acceptance, support her. (p.106)*

As prescriptive as Verrier is, with her five cardinal rules, they do seem to parallel with adoptive voices (Eldridge, 1999; Gladstine & Westhues, 1992; Grant, 2009; Harris, 2012; Syne *et al*, 2012). I, for one, can testify that without these five cardinal rules my childhood and development suffered greatly. My ability to understand and function competently (with a sense of confidence and self-empowerment) within the social world was arrested through my 'acting out' and desperation to find some understanding and capacity to deal with extreme emotional turmoil and pain associated with the adoptive process and being an adoptee.

One area that suffered due to this was my developing sexuality. Given the social context of 1980's working class Britain, highly charged with homophobic and stylised 'macho' men with strong sexist and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, inclusive of added scare mongering media portrays of AIDS as the gay disease (Baker, 2012; Clews, 2013; Plummer, 1981, 1999; Tachell, 2012); a young desperate teenager looking to fit in and find a sense of self, very quickly distorted and denied his sexual feelings and thoughts towards other men. With no secure place at home within his family structure to express and explore his same sex feelings, a process of 'internalised homophobia'<sup>21</sup> ensued and became a driving force in my inability to accept or understand my feelings towards other men.

In January 2015, I watched a documentary on Channel 4 entitled 'Queer as Pop' which presented and analyzed the Gay rights movement through its music from the 60's to the present.

### **In Response to Queer as Pop (January, 2015)**

I sat here and watched my history unfold before my eyes

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<sup>21</sup> Internalised Homophobia also called *internalized sexual stigma* refers to the personal acceptance and endorsement of sexual shame /stigma as part of the individual's value system and concept of self. (See Larson, 2014; Shidlo, 1994; Tracy, 2015; Williamson, 2000)

A life I wasn't able to openly live  
A life that has been shrouded in secrecy and closeted  
Loss, a sense of loss, a deep sense of loss  
A sense of shame  
Tears well up inside my heart unable to be released  
The anger puts a sharp stop to their emergence  
A guard that stands over the little boy shadowing his tears  
A fierce angry authority ready to hit and shout if I cry  
Where did my gay life go?  
Why haven't I been able to live it?  
Society wouldn't have accepted you, you had to survive  
Was I that scared of death?  
Yes, psychological exclusion and isolation – rejected from them all  
Is that what you wanted? You had to fit in  
You had to be seen as normal, as heterosexual, as a man  
I wanted to belong  
I wanted to be loved  
I needed to escape, and yet...  
I wanted that life, but now it's too late

The need to fit in is tantamount to the adopted child, and more than present in my textual account of my loss of an identity and sexuality that I've never really reclaimed or owned. Over the years I've often referred to myself and heard other adoptees call themselves 'social chameleons', adept actors at fitting into any social setting and being amenable and pleasant to those we interact with. Lifton (1979) refers to this *'people pleasing' behaviour as being a 'good adoptee'* (p.55). Always over generous with our time and feelings towards the other (originally

developed through the relationship with the adoptive parents, driven by the adoptees' need to belong and acquiesce with the adoptive parents). Lifton sees the 'good adoptee' as 'placid, obedient' always 'sensitive to their adoptive parent's needs', forever happy and compliant to play the 'adoptive game'<sup>22</sup>. Verrier (2009) relates this to the deeply held fear, the adoptee lives with, of being rejected or abandoned for the second time; accordingly, they play the 'good child' role to appease and to prevent the rejection.

I was happy to play the 'good adoptee' (and played it convincingly) until I started to experience the profound feelings of loss and grieving for my birth mother and family. Once I started to experience these intense and overwhelming feelings of loss and grief, the 'good adoptee' was very quickly replaced by the 'bad adoptee' (Lifton, 1979), the acting out and rebellious child, which again I convincingly played when unfortunately, my needs were not being met by my care givers. Brozinsky, Schechter & Henig (1992) confirm that the:

*sudden eruption of behaviour problems in six and seven-year-olds... [whose] parents and teachers call... "troublesome", "difficult", "disturbed" ...we often find are simply going through a period of grieving.'* (p.72)

Another aspect of 'acting out' or antisocial behaviour' from Lifton's (1979) perspective of the adoptee, and also from Verrier's (2009), is the ability of the adoptee to demonise or polarise the adoptive parents against the birth parents. An aspect of experiencing that I easily 'fell into'. This became apparent, and a process of my experience that was being 'played out' through Karpman's 'drama triangle'<sup>23</sup>. I played the victim (helpless, lost, disempowered adopted child for many years) with my adoptive parents being the unforgiving, un-empathic

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<sup>22</sup> The Adoption Game is a term coined by Lifton (1979) to describe the pretending, from all members of the adoptive family including the adopted child, in the false belief that the adopted child is socio-psychologically and biologically from the adoptive parents.

<sup>23</sup> Karpman's drama triangle consists of three social roles that people in relationships play out: victim, persecutor and rescuer. These roles are related to the distribution of power and responsibility of the people involved and the relationship boundaries that exist. (See <http://www.karpmamdramatriangle.com/>; Lister-Ford, 2002; Forrest, 2008)

persecutors of the poor abandoned child. This then left my birth mother and birth father, in classic fairy-tale cultural projections, to become the fairy godmother and the wise old king, who would save the poor innocent child from the clutches and power of the wicked step-parents (Bettleheim, 1991; Warner, 2014; Zipes, 2011, 2013).

Given the above account, this may sound undeniably histrionic...and the question could be posed: did I ever find my freedom?

**Freedom:**

**(In response to Queer as Pop)**

You are that life

Live it!

Freedom...

Live your life

I am living that life

Are you?

Make your friends and live it

Make your friends, the friends you always  
wanted!

Live it, Michael

Live your life, as you've always wanted to

Kiss the lips of life

Embrace the heart of life

Kiss your friends of life

Release your sexuality

Let your heart go

Release

Is this freedom?

Free your desires

Free your body and mind

Release your sexual energy

Touch, allow the touch

Embrace, allow the embrace

Feel; allow the body to feel

Allow your heart to feel!

Let go, and live life

Feel life

Feel its depths!

Embrace it!

Hold it! Touch it! Love it!

Be engulfed in waves of passion

Let your body be raised by it

Rise and plunge...

Let your body be loved...

in waves of affection

Release!

Relax!

You are free...

Adams (2011) describes the closet (the proverbial metaphor for a hidden gay identity) as: a 'private room'; a 'place of private devotion' and 'secluded speculation'; a 'private repository of curiosities'; as suggested by the phrase 'skeleton in the closet': a '*private or concealed trouble in one's house or circumstances, ever present, and ever liable to come into view*'. (p.39)

For a person to 'come out of the closet' - an act of self-testimony affirming one's identity, and as Evans and Barker (2010) confirm:

*['It] is not [necessarily] a single event, but an ongoing process, as new people enter one's life. It can be a relatively straightforward part of sexual self-discovery, or a very painful and difficult experience, with some enlisting the help of counsellors to sort through the emotional turmoil.' Given then, that you are 'coming out of the closet', it would first seem feasible that the person would have to be in the 'closet' (p.376)*

Adams (2011) agrees '*one must be in before coming out*' (p.40). My act of poetic 'Freedom' through the watching of 'Queer as Pop' on January 2015 was not a particularly life affirming moment. In fact, it helped to re-establish the belief that I am well and truly still in the 'closet'. Plus, coming out is not as straight forward as simply proclaiming one's 'gay identity to the world'; it is a very personal and unique process to each individual. As Clarke *et al.*, (2010) attest, it is complexly bound into one's culture, gender, age, family patterns and class. So, in the closet I am; Sedgwick (2008) illuminates by position beautifully:

*'Closetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it. (p.3)*

I am a product of my upbringing, a product of the northern working class 'discourse'<sup>24</sup> that constituted me through the relationships and actions of my social world; and from this establishment I have elected to be silent, mute, unable to voice my 'queer identity'.

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<sup>24</sup> Discourse is a term synonymous with Foucauldian analysis and post-structural theories (see Foucault, 1976, 1979, 1980; Power, 2015; Spargo, 1999). It refers to social worlds constituted

### 4.2.3 A Historic Interlude

As previously stated in the introduction (**section 4.1**), in this section and the following **sections 4.2.4, 4.2.5, 4.2.6**), I again draw on and expand narrative styles in the postmodern representation, *‘that expand the range of understanding, voice, and the storied variations in human experience.’* (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.184). The concept being that social scientists can also be poets, playwrights, and storytellers that interweave first person, second person and even third person accounts. The argument being that through this process and integration of science and art, a challenge, exposure and deconstruction is established of the ‘taken for granted’ ways that marginalise and disenfranchise certain groups’ voices. (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015; Kinchloe & Berry, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Muncey, 2010).

#### *A Father’s Attempt to make ‘the Boy’ Straight*

Was the ‘boy’ born gay? Or was it a combination of environmental factors and experiences with other people that contributed to him being gay? And for that matter, what is gay?

The ‘boy’s’ father never accepted the way he was as a child growing up. The ‘boy’s’ first sexual experiences that he can remember were with another boy and the excitement and pleasure he received. He was aged seven. He wanted to continue, but he got scared of being caught by his parents so they stopped and only did it again a few times in the future.

He was an extrovert child, always singing, dancing, having fun and being silly. His father didn’t approve of this behaviour and always scolded him, perhaps embarrassed by his behaviour admonishing him for it, humiliating him in front of other family members and other people that were present. In response to this the ‘boy’ would cry/sob to release the stress and pain he was feeling. This process continued until he was 11 years old, at which point the

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through language, images, narratives, and metaphors, which emphasise the socio-political construction of reality and the political sites of struggle.

'boy's' father said, *'You are not a real boy as you cry'*. In immediate response the 'boy' stopped crying, and from that moment onwards he suppressed the pain and ridicule. Eventually rage and anger began to manifest, first internally toward the 'boy' (which he tried to suppress with comfort sugary foods) and secondly externally toward children at his school. He would fight and cause disruption.

The 'boy' was unable to manage his pain and ultimately as the years progressed his father finally 'broke-him' at age 12. Being completely petrified of his father and the looks of derision; the 'boy' conflated his father's disapproval into a body of knowledge contained inside him.

The 'boy' would ask himself the same questions over and over again: what had he done to warrant this from his father? Why did his father hate him so much?

The 'boy' as he became an adolescent and then eventually a young man, had a few ideas as to why his father was the way he was with him; but he kept them to himself. The 'boy' did finally 'man-up' becoming tough, whilst suppressing his emotions and anger; just like his father. He didn't cry anymore, or show any public signs of weakness. The 'boy' became a 'straight man' - whatever that is?

#### **4.2.4 Enter stage right**

[The] man who does not produce an accountable, intelligible performance of 'masculinity' is often assumed to be gay. (Rahman & Jackson, 2011, p.164)

For the social actor it is imperative that s/he produces a convincing performance, if s/he is to be accepted and believed in their role; and according to David Mamet (1997) *'it is easy to get the mob to agree with you – all you have to do is agree with the mob.'* (p.111)

Goffman (1977, p.319), our social performing actor, did not see or believe there to be any particular distinctiveness between 'sex' as a biological division of male and female, and the concept of 'gender' that denotes the social creation of boys, girls, men and women. For



Goffman the differences in the embodied self are a product of language and the meaning values that inform them. If this is the case then the ability to reproduce the cultural performance (stereotype) is a matter of agreeing with Mamet's (1997,) 'mob' or majority, or at least being believed you are agreeing with them. Relating this to heterosexuality, Rahman and Jackson (2011) are clear on this point:

*Doing heterosexuality is often invisible, because it is a taken-for-granted feature of social life that the majority of people are heterosexual. This is one aspect of what is usually called 'heteronormativity': the ways in which heterosexuality is subtly normalized so that it is rarely questioned. (p.164)*

For all sense and purposes, this is exactly what I did. I became and framed my Self within the taken-for-granted world of the heterosexual majority. I portrayed myself as a 'straight-acting' male and within the cultural eyes of my social world (Northern working-Class Britain); as far as anyone else was concerned I was straight/heterosexual. My friends never questioned my sexuality, my adoptive parents never questioned my sexuality, and I conveniently forgot about my 'other' sexuality.

However, we could argue and ask the question: is it that easy? How many times have we heard the essentialist<sup>25</sup>, biological and even genetic (gay gene) argument that 'homosexuality' is an innate predisposed feature (Bagemihl, 1999; Bailey & Pillard, 1991; Hamer, 1993, 1999; Le Vay, 1991; McFadden & Pasanen, 1998; Norton, 2008; Stein, 2011; Witt, 2008)?

Can you just forget about your attraction and sexual leanings to the same sex?

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<sup>25</sup> Essentialism claims that a person or group of people, for example women, has specific traits that are typical and necessary for their function and identity. In gender politics it is the concept that men and women behave differently and have different options in life because of *intrinsic* or *essential* differences. (See Norton, 2008; Stone, 2004; Stein, 2011; Witt, 2008)

#### 4.2.5 Sexual Suppression

My sexuality and sexual orientation toward men was suppressed and hidden away through adolescence and young adulthood, even to myself. I denied and distorted my feelings toward the same sex and worked hard at developing sexual feelings toward women and playing the ‘macho heterosexual man’ that my father so admired. I remember my first adolescent sexual experience with a girl a year older than me aged 16; she wanted to experience sexual intercourse, so I agreed. It was uncomfortable, it felt strange and I did not enjoy it, in fact it was incredibly stressful and scary.

My next sexual experience was with a different girlfriend when I was 16 years old. The group of lads I associated with all had girlfriends and we would have parties at a friend’s house on a Friday evening, as his parents went out. These were fun times where the girls and lads would drink alcohol, take drugs and have sex, me included. I would strive to present a ‘macho-tough’ image and be what I thought was the epitome of a ‘real lad’. This entailed lots of drinking, lots of bravado, and being tough. However, when it came to sexual intercourse the image began to falter; I always struggled. We would perform sex, but I would then have to pretend being too drunk to complete, when I would more than often lose the ability.

Sadly, for me, my heart was set on another, my best and close friend at the time; I’ll call him S. I worshipped him and I know that he loved me too. Our love was never allowed to be open and we would hide it behind closed doors and the image of our ‘macho-bravado’ which having girlfriends helped to uphold. Sadly, my love, died one evening riding his motorcycle when he was hit by a truck, he was killed instantly at age 17. Our close relationship had already ceased for 6 months when I heard of his death. We had both gone to the same college after school, but our paths had started to drift. We had both ‘unspoken’ decided to progress down the path of heterosexuality (which entailed me promiscuously having sex with most of the girls within the new group I was with). For us to be accepted we needed to carry on this bravado and convincing performance of ‘straightness’ and end what we had started many

years earlier. An unwritten pact, denying each other, too scared to acknowledge what we had, unrequited, our love had gone adrift.

The funeral came and was filled with many people. I remember standing outside with a lad that S and I used to go Karate training with, one of the tough guys of our town, his family was renowned. I was so angry that I couldn't get into the crematorium, and that some of S's friends from his college course were in there, and I the one that loved him so deeply had to stand outside, so far away from him. As the service started I began to cry. I sobbed my heart out, the Karate lad looked at me and nodded his head in agreement, but he never cried, he held back his tears living up to his tough/hard image. I sobbed like a baby from the moment it had started to the end of the service, my heart was bursting; why had my love died and left me all alone?

*The difficulties inherent in dating same-sex partners during adolescence are monumental... The vast majority of lesbian, bisexual, and gay youths are closeted, not out to themselves, let alone to others... [apparent are] the consequences... such as verbal and physical harassment from peers [and] the lack of public recognition... Thus same-sex dating remains hidden and mysterious, something that is either ridiculed, condemned, or ignored.*

(Savin-Williams, 2004, p.119)

I never really got over S's death, and it haunted me for many, many years after. I eventually made the next step to University after college, but dropped out after two years. Through this period, I had started to acknowledge my sexuality more. I went to gay bars and gay clubs and started to have a relationship with a guy called D, which lasted for 8 months. I never openly spoke of this relationship to my adoptive parents, and they never asked; although I would leave gay lifestyle magazines in my room for them to see.

Ken Plummer in his 1973 paper 'Awareness of Homosexuality' wrote:

*To be called a homosexual is to be degraded, rendered as morally dubious, or treated as different... publicly... is to invite your employer to sack you, your parents to reject you, the*

*law to imprison you, the doctor to cure you, the moralist to denounce you, the public to mock you, the priest to pity you, the liberal to patronise you and the queer-basher to kill you...Given such costs it is little wonder that most homosexuals elect to conceal their identity from public gaze. (p.103)*

Although Plummer's quote was written in relation to 1970's Britain, and by the time of my suppression of my sexuality there had been some public reform and emerging social tolerance of homosexuality; for example in the same year as Plummer's paper, homosexuality as a psychiatric illness had been removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* used by psychiatrists to diagnose patients; and prior to that, only six years earlier, homosexuality had at last been decriminalised in the UK, making it a non-criminal act for consenting male adults aged 21 years and over. In the media we saw the *Gay Times* in 1983 increase its readership to fifty thousand and Channel 4 saw the introduction of *In the Pink* a series of gay films in 1986 (Plummer, 1981, 1999), of which I remember watching them all, my favourite being 'My Beautiful laundrette' directed by Stephen Frears; not only did this film challenge the portrayal of gay men at the time, it also bravely highlighted through the sexual/love relationship of a young white male and an Indian male, the racial and cultural stereotypes that were also prevalent in Britain in this period.

Although there would appear to have been emerging tolerance; Tachell (2012) would ardently voice his disagreement with my above statement. According to Tachell:

*The 1980s were a period of intensified homophobia, sanctioned from the top echelons of society: the government, church, police and tabloids. It was open season on queers...Margret Thatcher was at war with the LBGT community. (p.1)*

Baker (2012) would also agree with Tachell's position;

*The 1980s were Homophobic Britain's Golden Age – with a toxic mixture of factors contributing to some of the most violently spiteful outpourings in the British press ever seen. Mrs Thatcher's Conservative government did little to encourage tolerance. (p.3)*

So, in the late 1980's and early 1990's, after the loss of my love S, I safely stayed in the closet. In the northern working-class town that I grew up in, tolerance toward homosexuality was minimal - in fact I'd go so far as to say that Plummer's 1973 above quote stayed true well into the 2000's. Yes, I may have been courageous to lay the gay lifestyle magazines '*Attitude*' and '*Phase*' out on display in my bedroom in 1995 for my adoptive parents to see. But to approach this subject directly with them, was anathema, and verging on social suicide. My adoptive parents never mentioned the magazines, or questioned my late-night stopovers in the city of Manchester's Gay 'Village' Scene (Canal Street). They never asked me about my partner D. Although once at University, away from my cultural roots, I'd began to expose myself more to 'gay life' as previously stated. I had even been 'brave' enough (or stupid enough) to raise the topic of my sexuality and its variants with my old school friends, who I would see when I returned in holiday periods. Some of my old school friends were also at University, so they too were experiencing and being exposed to 'city life' and the diversity and difference that exists within it. As a collective my friendship group quickly 'eccentri-fied' me as being the 'deviant' of the group; the crazy risk taker who would try and do anything for a laugh. They never questioned my relationship with D even though I'd mentioned it to them and that he was a male friend. The only acknowledgement I got from my school friends was regarding my apparent over active sex drive and that I evidently needed to satisfy this, so their resulting conclusion was: I obviously didn't care where I got my sexual gratification from as long as I was '*getting some*', to quote their terminology.

The fact that I had developed an intimate and loving relationship with D, built on mutual respect and care, as well as enjoying loving sexual relations, did not appear to matter to my school friends. The social façade and identity of the northern working-class male, of which they had of me, had to stay intact. The thought of, or even social acknowledgment of '*one of them*' being classed as a '*queer*' was not acceptable and did not fit with their world view. The Actor (c'est moi!) still had to uphold the social behaviours, language, actions and

demeanour that portrayed the character/social role/stereotype my school friends understood, accepted and felt comfortable with; any signs of ‘gayness’ (see Plummer, 1973) whatever that is, was ignored, denied and distorted to fit with their world view.

I was one of them. I’d been born and raised a northern working-class lad; I knew and played the role well. My concept/image of ‘Self’ (Burkitt, 2008; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1970; Polkinghorne, 1991) was created and shaped through my relationships with the people from this community, with all the values and beliefs this community holds deep (Blackshaw, 2013; Kearney, 1996; Strangleman, 2013). From a Foucauldian perspective I was living the dominate discourse that had helped to shape me (Foucault, 1972); and as Burr (2004) affirms, *‘Our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us’* (p.106). The culture that was available to me growing up and the one I had been ‘thrown into’<sup>26</sup>, to adopt the existential term, was the northern working-class culture.

#### **4.2.6 A Historic Interlude 2: To Listen**

##### ***The Boy makes sense of it All***

Every time the Boy goes back to that house and stays in that room his old wounds open up. A sad lonely little boy in his room, misunderstood, unheard and unaccepted; growing, trying his best to be what he wanted him to be, yet it was all so alien to him. He could never be what he wanted him to be, he was not him.

The Boy’s ideals and dreams were very different, they were high and progressive. He wanted success, a beautiful song to sing, a flamboyant story to tell, a way to fulfil his dreams; a way to develop into a multi-talented man of triumphs. He (the father) was very different. He was oppressed, scared and unable, his social class and upbringing had spoken.

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<sup>26</sup> Thrownness is an existential concept which denotes an individual’s non-choice of coming into existence in a cultural time and place; and the concomitant factors that accompany this, for example cultural opinions, attitudes and mores. (See Spinelli, 2005)

*'I was not destined to stay in a small town and live an ordinary life', proclaimed the Boy, 'prescribed class status and values of which I do not agree.' 'I want more out of life. I want to live a full life, not a suppressed life of fear and mediocrity.'* His parents could not understand this, and tried to mould him into a boy/man that was also scared of achieving and growth (upholding and living their working-class belief of *'not getting above your station'*). This was common in the area.

*'From my experience, I find the working-class culture and ideology to be an oppressive regime',* said the Boy, now a young Man. *'Although not a complete prison as the walls do have potential to be scaled; one can find some emancipation through social mobility, either by educating oneself and acquiring professional status, or applying keen business acumen and becoming financially affluent, or a mixture of the two'.* The Boy/Man was definitely feeling more confident.

However, this did raise two interesting questions for the Boy/Man: *'So why do not more working-class people try and ascend these walls? And what is so different with the people that do?'*

The Boy/Man looked to the theories of Carl Rogers (1951; 1959; 1961; 1980) to find some understanding and clarity to his problems:

*'What is interesting',* declared the Boy/Man, *'is that this working-class ideology is enforced by the people that live it (Marxist concepts of capitalism and false consciousness) and when individuals try to move beyond this, the group or family works hard to pull them back to the level they exist at through instilling moral values and codes explicit to that culture; yet serving to keep them in oppression and repressed (this is your lot, so you should be grateful!).'* The Boy/Man was having a revelation. *'This is genius,* thought the Boy/Man, *'even ideologically subverting certain moral concepts e.g. equality and mutuality, into conditioned oppressive regimes that keep people in structured groups unable to move beyond them with the fear of being ostracised, alienated and unloved, if you dare to adopt any values or beliefs that are different from the groups.'* The Boy/Man was highlighting Rogers' (1959; 1961) concept of introjected values and especially conditions of worth within a group relation, whereby the individual feels the conditions not only from significant individuals (parents) but also from the group as a whole. The power to belong and be accepted/loved by the group is

strong, as the group is your way to survive and grow at that point in time. *'So, in some ways I conformed to certain values'*, acknowledged the Boy/Man, *'of course I needed to get certain things from the group and individuals to survive. Ha, Ha, but least we forget I was also learning and growing through immersion into other sub-groups and institutions (e.g. gay culture, college and University) and starting to understand the structures and regimes that I was directly living in, which led me to, and gave me the possible ways of ascending them. Halleluia! Of course, I did ascend them and here I am now!'* The Boy/Man felt relief, at last he understood. The future looks bright...

### 4.3 Summary

To achieve authenticity and openness to present an experience and place in time, it is suggested and encouraged that the auto-ethnographer writes from a place of vulnerability exposing the aspects of self, relationships, and cultural life that have influenced and shaped the experience being written about and represented (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Muncey, 2010). Through this chapter I have presented a 'snapshot' of a cultural time and place, exposing and exploring my understanding of this and how I have understood the impact and influences this has had on my self-development, especially related to aspects of my sexuality. As with all auto-ethnographic accounts, this is a single subjective representation that is unique to the researcher, and as McIlveen (2008) claims readers of these accounts should be familiar and aware of the limitations to generalisability.

However, if we adopt the late 1960's feminist rally cry, *'What is personal is political'*; we can start to question McIlveen's claim, and begin to see how the personal aspects of an individual's experience may have some relevance to the wider socio-political sphere.

In the next chapter I will represent and invite the reader into the lives and experiences of the other participants.



## Chapter 5: Stage Two – The Participants’ Heuristic Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

*Knowledge of the individual participant’s experience...is comprehensively apprehended by the researcher...the data and notes enable the heuristic researcher to construct an individual depiction of the experience...[retaining] the language and includes examples drawn from the co-researcher’s experience of the phenomenon. (Moustakas, 1990, p.51)*

The above process is then repeated for each participant, and when this is completed the immersion process is undertaken again:

*The researcher develops a composite depiction that represents the common qualities and themes that embrace the experience of the co-researchers...The composite depiction includes all of the core meanings of the phenomenon as experienced by the individual participants and by the group as a whole. (Moustakas, 1990, p.52)*

The research question that underpins this thesis is: *How do adult adoptees make sense of and present their sexuality and self/identity?*

Ten participants were involved in this analysis. In this chapter, the process and representation of how the research question is answered at this stage of the thesis, will be presented through the ten participants’ individual depictions. The individual depiction, according to Moustakas (1990), is a representation of the qualities and themes of the participant’s experience of the phenomenon under study; therefore, adult adoptee’s sexuality. Moustakas (1990) states, ‘*The individual depiction may include descriptive narrative...verbatim conversations, poetry and artwork.*’ (p.50)

For the participants’ individual depictions, as Moustakas suggests (1990), I have chosen to use poetry, narrative description and verbatim quotes. There are two reasons for this: the first is to uphold the heuristic inquiry of representation; and the second is as a process

of interpretation and representation, which is in-line with the methodological structure of the bricolage used in this thesis (See **section 3.3.2**).

Richardson (2000) claims, '*a poem is the shortest emotional distance between two points – the speaker and the reader*' (p.933). Thus, the poetic form can heighten the effect of analysis and representation. The poem and poetical articulation is also a response and challenge to modernist scientific conventions and discursive practices, with an emphasis to further uphold postmodern methods for seeing and moving beyond the modernist positivist paradigm (Etherington, 2004; Lincoln & Gubba, 2000; Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013; Muncey, 2010; Richardson, 2001). I, therefore, open with a brief introduction to each participant, followed by a poem created by me from the analysis, and the narrative account. The participant's verbatim quotes are in *italics* following the researcher's presentations.

Regarding the composite depiction, Moustakas (1990) suggests the composite depiction should be a group reflection:

*reflecting the experience of the individual participants*'. He also suggests that it should include, '*narratives, descriptive accounts, illustrations, and verbatim excerpts that accentuate the flow, spirit and life inherent in the experience*. (p.52)

Thus, taking my lead from Moustakas, I've created a pictorial collage, encompassing Moustakas' above suggestions, to reflect and represent the group depiction of adult adoptee's sexuality.

The third and final aspect of this chapter, and the findings, will be presented as the 'creative synthesis' of the heuristic process, as explained by Moustakas (1990):

*The final step in heuristic presentation...is the creative synthesis. The creative synthesis encourages a wide range of freedom in characterizing the phenomenon. It invites...tacit-intuitive awareness of the researcher...as scientist-artist develops an aesthetic rendition of the themes and...meanings...that can be expressed through a narrative, story, poem, work of art, metaphor, analogy, or tale* (p.52).

The final ‘creative synthesis’ will capture and present all the findings as a whole from chapters 4, 5 and 6, encompassing the underpinning heuristic process of the bricolage used in this thesis (see **section 3.3.2**).

## 5.2 Sam’s Story

Sam is a man in his late 50’s from the north of England, although he was born in north London. Sam has two daughters with whom he has a close relationship, and is separated from their mother. He now has a long-term girlfriend with whom he is happy. Sam categorises himself as heterosexual.

Sam’s poem (see **Table 5**):

**Table 5 – Sam’s poem**

<b>Sexual Vulnerability</b>
<b>Let us start with a happy family, that’s how I (want) to remember it</b>
<b>Lots of laughs and openness to all - is how it was for me</b>
<b>But then hold on...is there more to tell?</b>
<b>A childhood, a house, a family, a home, you must be grateful for these</b>
<b>A sister and cousins and all so many, with so much difference to see</b>
<b>We played our games, our needs were met, well I think that’s how it goes</b>
<b>But then there was he...</b>
<b>Critical, impatient, stern he was, when all I wanted was love</b>
<b>He’d lose his rag; he’d get annoyed with the kid that wasn’t his lad</b>
<b>It hurt me deep; it hit me hard, yet fear kept me in order</b>
<b>I was good at sport, I was athletic, but it didn’t really seem to matter</b>
<b>I wasn’t his son; I wasn’t his boy, so to women I turned for the latter</b>
<b>They gave me love, they made me safe, in their arms I could really ‘be’</b>

So, when I grew, my sexual drive secured me women to flatter
A passionate drive, a fiery drive, is what I'm told by my lovers
Yet deep inside, the vulnerable boy, hides under the covers
He tried his best to beat this away, but it wasn't going to go
The vulnerable me, the sensitive me, the seeds of which I sow
Access to her is access to them, to fulfil the lost love from my mother
They'd feed my need, they'd satisfy my yearning for the feminine that I longed for
Unique are we, different am I, yet we all miss the mother inside us
Self-protection I am, painful it feels when the sensitive child gets kicked
Cold I can be, to cut them dead is a trait I use to dismiss
Although sad I am, when my daughter does it, what I used to protect from the other
Guilt I feel, I wished she didn't, she doesn't need to use it like I do
The adoption it caused the vulnerable boy, he's always been my priority
Yet still I find trust so hard to obtain, can I really be seen in the eyes of my lover?
An unknown world is before my eyes, yet in here I still long for my mother

Sam was very sure and definite regarding his sexual identity and how this was linked to his sexual drive and energy. *'Someone described me as one of the most sexually motivated people they'd ever met so obviously it must be part of my prominent self to other people, my sexuality is important to me.'*

Sam went on further to identify with marginalised groups that find identity in their sexuality, and Sam further points to the significance of his sexual drive and energy into forming a sense of identity, *'that's why I understand if someone you know, is a homosexual person, gay or lesbian and are very passionate about that and sexuality is a key point in who they are, I get that entirely because I feel that myself as a heterosexual, I wouldn't like to be an a-sexual person'*

Another strong component to Sam's identity, and one that he values, is his vulnerable self. *'Dad would always say you're being over sensitive and that would characterise me at that time. I've gotten used to it now, I've got the scars to prove it, but I still have that sensitive sensual side to me and I don't want to lose that its part of who I am.'* Sam's vulnerable aspect of self also helped him create positive relationships with the women in his life, *'It's something they can empathise with and it's easier with two daughters and with having so many nieces, you know they come to me, I would describe two of my nieces as some of my best friends, which is great'.*

The need to search and find understanding was another prominent aspect to Sam's life and identity, even found within the job and roles Sam has had over the years, being a detective in the police force and a fraud investigator. Sam even disclosed drug use in his early years as an adventure/journey to find self. *'Later, I became a free-lance fraud investigator...I was an analytical researcher type of person, the drugs thing was an adventure I think I got into because of my adoption and because of my open environment...I was adopted I wanted to search, I was trying to search for something much deeper than just a nice happy life.'*

The question that emerges through the process of Sam's analysis: Is the need to find a deep feminine connection, his longing to satisfy the relinquishment of his birth mother? Sam's life and relationships have been centred on searching for self with a strong focus on his relationships to women. His vulnerability and passionate drives have secured and met his needs through his emotional and sexual relationships with the women in his life, thus shaping Sam's sexual identity as an adult adoptee. Sam told me during the interview that his birth mother had been mentally ill, hence his being adopted. When he did eventually find his birth mother's family his mother had already died; although he did meet his birth sister and was openly accepted by his birth family.

### 5.3 Anna's story

Anna is a woman in her forties. She is in a long-term relationship with a man, and is a mother. She is separated from her children's father. Anna categorised herself as bisexual.

Anna's poem (see Table 6):

**Table 6 - Anna's poem**

<b>An Unusual Name</b>
<b>As a little girl I longed for love, and nurture to make me feel special</b>
<b>As I grew up my sexual behaviour could get me this and in trouble</b>
<b>I'd use my body and flirt myself to fill that empty space</b>
<b>She gave me up but gave me a name, so surely, she must have cared?</b>
<b>It gives me hope and a sense of me connected to my long-lost family</b>
<b>I couldn't cope when I was young, my adoptive siblings didn't help either</b>
<b>Jealousy and fights were a plenty, in my dysfunctional adoptive family</b>
<b>A need to be loved, a need to be cared for, a need to be accepted I asked</b>
<b>So, my friends were many when I was a girl, to satisfy this need so vast</b>
<b>I'd give up myself to satisfy this need to be included within their group</b>
<b>But as I grew older I realised the victim that I had allowed to ensue</b>
<b>My inner worth was tied up with theirs and it made me feel so bad</b>
<b>A spiritual path is where I turned to now find my inner balance</b>
<b>An inner self-love that transcends my pain makes it far easier to live</b>
<b>A mother's role also gave me a place and children to help me be me</b>
<b>My daughters so brave and confident to say, but I still fear that point of rejection</b>
<b>"Go on, mum, pick up the phone; and say hello to Grandma?"</b>
<b>But this I can't do, I'm not strong enough to experience that possible rejection</b>

**Although she gave me a name, my birth name in fact, which does answer some questions**

**It connects to my ancestry, my blood ties and family, though physically we are at a distance**

**So here I am, my friends are my family, although I'd never bring them together**

**Each one meets a need in me; each one shares their love so dearly**

**Remember when you attain the children, adoptive parents this is for you**

**Please keep their name, their family lineage, as to do otherwise is disrespectful.**

What initially became prominent in the interview with Anna was her reclaiming and using of her birth name. She liked this name and found identity in the uniqueness of the name her birth mother had given her. *'It wasn't until I was 28 that I found out that actually my name was (birth name) and that was a huge, huge shock which I wasn't expecting. And it also made me think that my birth mum obviously really did care about me to give me that really unusual name. I don't know anyone else who is called that. So, she must have really cared about me.'*

The need for love in Anna's life has played itself out in many ways, especially when she was younger; what is significant is how Anna has used sex and her sexuality to secure feelings of 'love' and intimacy through her relationships with other people. *'Now I think in my twenties I think maybe I shouldn't have done that but kind of having sex for me was affirmation of love, which is ridiculous because sex can just be sex but in my head because I had opened up with somebody I felt like they would love me forever because I had had sex with them.'*

Moving into her forties Anna's understanding of love and her need for a deeper emotional connection had changed. *'Even the guy that I'm with, I just love him for the person he is rather than the way that he looks, which he can't understand because he says you've got to have a physical attraction with somebody but for me you need to be in love with the person that's inside.'*

A sense of self was highlighted and revisited by Anna throughout the interview. The need to find understanding and consolidate a unique sense of self was tantamount to Anna. *'I feel I'm very, very different from anybody and everybody that I know.'* This again is highlighted through her reclaiming of her birth name. *'(Birth name) is definitely me. I can relate to (birth name) so much more than I can relate to (adoptive name). To me (birth name) kind of sums me up as well, as I said before I feel I'm a very unique person and (birth name) enhances that because it is a very different name. I'm much happier with (birth name) but there's not very many people who actually call me (birth name), obviously people I've just met, new friends and new acquaintances will call me (birth name). I love hearing the sound of the name though, when people call me that I inwardly smile (laughing) I really love that name.'*

The *fragile me* of Anna emerged and presented itself in many ways. There was a distance and justification to find peace, yet coupled with a desperate need and vulnerability when relating to others in her life, especially regarding her adoptive mother's death. *'I was upset my mum had passed because I absolutely loved her and I still do but I think it's just life. And at forty you kind of think well that's just what happens in life.'* Yet Anna was able to own the vulnerability and fragility when relating to searching for her birth mother. *'You know it's all those questions you want answered but I'm scared, too scared to ask them and contact her because I don't want that rejection. I don't want her to say I don't want anything to do with you because that would really upset me.'*

The fragility also showed itself in the disabling fear of rejection. *'I went to \*\*\*\*\* with my boy which is not far and I said to myself shall I take the address, shall I go and stand outside the house, shall I, what if she did come out of the house and I saw her. I'd be stuck to the spot. I'd find it really scary'*

It also came through with the need for love and fear of loneliness. *'I would seek attention, absolutely. (pause) I didn't sleep around hugely but I did go from one relationship to the next. I was in a relationship for 7 years from 18 and I was then in one for 4 years and then I went*



*off the rails a bit in my late twenties, I'd say I probably slept with quite a few people because of that need.'*

Anna's sexuality and sexual identity while being fragile at times has been used to gain love and acceptance from people in her life. In her early years she used sex to gain love and acceptance from others of either sex, *'I was seeking attention from males or females it didn't really matter, for me, it was all about the person rather than if they are male or female.'*

Anna also attributed being adopted to the need to seek out attention and acceptance, which the sexual behaviour in her younger days fulfilled. *'I do believe that the adoption fuelled my behaviour because I didn't feel a part of that adoptive family that made it even worse because I needed to seek it from somewhere else.'*

Now in her forties Anna is happy with her sexuality and sexual identity and can acknowledge the change through relational experience. *'I'm very, very happy with my sexuality. I feel as if I don't have to seek out attention, if it's going to come to me, it's going to come to me. I've got a very different approach to when I was younger and I think that comes from motherhood and marriage, and being in a relationship for ten years with the children's father. So, I believe my sexuality has changed hugely, I am a completely different person than when I was in my twenties. I'm very content with who am I and what I am.'*

### **5.2.2 Vox's story**

Vox is a man in his thirties, who identifies as gay. He is single and considers himself a fairly ordinary guy. He does not consider himself to be stereotypical of a media portrayed image of a westernised gay man. Vox decided that he only wanted to be interviewed for 30 minutes, as he felt the 50 minutes wasn't necessary and too long. He'd come prepared with what he wanted to say, and had clear points around his sexuality and sexual identity which he wanted to share.

Vox's poem (see **Table 7**):

**Table 7 - Vox's poem**

<b>Dominate Adoptive Mum</b>
<b>I want to be a man</b>
<b>I want to be seen as a man and accepted</b>
<b>I am gay, this is me, but this isn't all of me, I am more than my sexuality</b>
<b>Women all around me, no stereotype-male to identify with – anger and sadness I feel - Who was I?</b>
<b>Who am I now? I still feel low in my-self; it still hurts not knowing my birth mum and family</b>
<b>Lies always lies, always not knowing, always untruths; who can I trust? Uncertainty rules...</b>

What was interesting about Vox's interview and became apparent quite early on was Vox's contradiction regarding his understanding of his sexuality and sexual identity. *'I identify as Gay. I don't really know if I understand my sexuality.'* Three prominent themes came through in the analysis of Vox: *sexually unwavering*, *stereotypes*, and *pain of me*, however they do signify a clearer understanding and representation of Vox's sexuality than he initially offered.

Sexually unwavering was prominent throughout the interview. *'I was attracted to boys and men from early age maybe year 8. I remember it first as being attracted to really masculine tomboy girls who later on in life identified as lesbian. From high school on it was pretty clear I was attracted to guys.'*

He took being gay as an intrinsic attraction to men. *'I don't know if my sexuality means anything to me now in my 30's other than it's who I'm attracted to.'*

Vox made it clear to me in the interview that he did not and wished not for others to stereotype him as a gay man. He had struggled with his sexual identity and forming a

positive image outside of the stereotype. *'When I was younger we had to go to gay clubs and gay pride to feel free and comfortable, so in the back of my mind it constantly created inner turmoil and it made it seem like it was something I had to hide or could only express when I was around others in same situations.'*

Vox's need to identify with stereotypical heterosexual activities and be seen as a 'typical guy' outside of the stereotypical gay man was highlighted. *'I didn't really start doing guy things until I was out of secondary school. That's when I really embraced being a guy and started getting into things like car repair mechanics, sports etc...'*

The stereotypes theme continued with Vox's up-bringing being female dominated with passive male roles. *'I would say possibly I had a very micromanaging controlling adoptive mother very insecure and my dad was very passive. I also grew up with one sister who was 7 years older than me and similar to my mum. We were never close and I always hated having a sister.'*

Although in ways Vox was sure regarding his sexuality and identity, an inner pain and sadness came through in our interview. *'Early on you learn not to trust anyone or anything because you have already suffered through the horrible lie that is adoption.'*

His anger and pain came through further in relation to his adoption and how it had shaped him. *'For me the adoption process was built on lies half-truths and secrets and asks the adoptee to accept unanswered questions and limited information as their truth.'*

This had and still does affect his sense of self and worth as an individual; he even refers to Verrier's (2009) concept of the 'primal wound'. *'It created a lot of the primal wound stuff Nancy Verrier talks about in her book. I grew up disconnected from my true self and really never formed a strong sense of self. To this day I struggle with low self-esteem and sense of purpose.'*

Although it is more than unwavering that Vox is clear regarding his sexuality as a gay man and his sexual attraction to men; it is also clear that Vox struggles and has struggled with the stereotypes that this identity can carry. His adoption and up-bringing has also had a clear impact on shaping his sense of self and how his low self-worth has and

still does influence his confidence regarding his sexuality and sexual identity. *‘You’re asked to take on a new identity by society and an adopted family that constantly overlooks your primal wound with expectations that where you come from doesn’t matter.’*

### 5.2.3 Pan’s story

Pan is a man in his late twenties and in a long-term relationship with a woman. Pan categorises himself as a Cisgender straight man<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, Pan’s body fits with society’s description of a male body. Pan was assigned the gender of male at birth, and Pan sees himself as a man; the ‘straight man’ referring to Pan as heterosexual.

Pan’s poem (see **Table 8**):

**Table 8 - Pan's poem**

Path of Least Resistance
The fluidity in my sexual self – is it me or is it them?
Can I be truly me? What is truly me?
My need to ‘fit in’- I can be one of the lads
I can fit in – no one will notice the other parts of me...
If I stay too long they may start to see, they may start to see all those other parts of me
Are these inconsistencies, or fragmentations of the whole?
Can I be accepted? Is this my only goal?
The other’s perception really counts Am I dependent on their judgement to find a sense of self?
The vulnerable me, the sexual me, the outlandish me, the ambiguous me Is this a way to define and stay neutral for others to see?

<sup>27</sup> Cisgender: ‘is a label that describes individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity’ (Garbacik, 2013, p.13)

My need to adapt, to fit the mould - the other's perception always taking hold
My fear of rejection, my fear of being seen
The unacceptability of the other's image of me
I can't be angry at her, it wasn't her fault.
It's easier to blame my adoptive mum, for all the pain that still carries on
My deep well of anger, my deep well of pain – an acceptable way of expressing
But still not acceptable to me
Would I have chosen another path?
The path of 'least resistance' was the easier one for me.
So am I a product of this deep well of pain?
A product that's driven by my need to 'fit in'?
Yet I question this now, do I do it for her?
To make her feel comfortable with the stereotype that is her ideal
My sex is sexually dependent on the image I have been shown
My pornographic fictions that connect my body and soul
Mapped through the other, mapped through their scene
Mapped onto my existence because I've taken it in
The straight man is easier than the other roles to play
It's easier than having to fight or be confronted if you were the other way
So the path of 'least resistance' is where I'll happily stay
And my sexuality will conform, until it's time to change.

The 'path of least resistance' was a theme that was continually revisited within the 50 minutes of our interview process, and one that Pan seemed to question throughout the process. This was accompanied with the questioning and ambiguity of Pan's theme *sexual*

*options* that emerged through our time together, and also the theme *fear of being seen* by the other in the varying social contexts that Pan existed in. The ‘path of least resistance’ seemed to underpin Pan’s decisions within in his life regarding aspects of his sexuality and how he presented his sexual identity.

The theme *sexual options* incorporated the diversity within Pan’s sexuality and the many varying aspects he has considered throughout his life. Pan made it clear from the start of our interview that although he identified as Cisgender, he also wanted to appear to others with a more neutral identity, *‘I think in recent years I’ve tried to actively become more androgynous, and less overtly masculine.’* This was accompanied with his searching for his birth family and understanding his identity as being a more fluid process through this, *‘when I started searching for them and then explored my own identity as more of a fluid thing in my life.’*

He also experimented with his sexuality, *‘I spent some time a few years ago experimenting, went to some gay clubs kissed some men, you know, flirted, enjoyed having that...I guess for me a) it felt a lot like getting in touch with my feminine side and b) being flirty demonstrative and touching other men and stuff like that.’*

Although Pan has experimented with different aspects of his sexuality, the relationships in his life and social contexts have had a prominent impact on this process, especially his adoptive family, *‘The academic attitude my adoptive family had toward me was, tick your own boxes but then at the same time there was this ingrained culture of language that makes it pretty obvious what attitudes towards that section of society, so definitely, homophobia plays a big part in that definitely. Culturally it’s difficult to be pluralist or to experiment.’*

This has impacted on Pan’s playing the ‘straight guy’ to be socially accepted, *‘One thing I’ve noticed by all of the girlfriends I’ve ever had, almost every single one has said to me, you’re really, really straight.’* Which somewhat contradicts how Pan actually sees himself, *‘all have*

*said to me you're very, very straight, almost archetypal straight-man, which is funny because it's not how I see myself.'*

Pan's need to be accepted by society, *'that's what I need to do to be comfortable in this environment and that goes also for the other avenue to be straight, to fit in, the path of least resistance right.'*, feels shaped and constructed by his fear of the other aspects of himself being seen through his 'straight persona', *'I can be comfortable at one level, and be with these people because I'm not sticking out like a sore thumb, my heads not above the parapet and not attracting attention, I'm not like a weird guy sitting on my own but I'm not the centre of attention either but as you become more embroiled you become more exposed to people at a less superficial level and that becomes dangerous.'*

This corresponded with Pan's vulnerability of relationships and getting close to others, *'Becoming closer in relationship is making yourself vulnerable, right. The closer you are to someone the more vulnerable you are'*, and this vulnerability and fear of being seen reinforced his need to socially adapt, and become the social chameleon by not staying in places too long to be seen on a deeper level, *'the times I begin to get a bit more unsure about how I'm behaving and how I feel and then it's time for a change, so in that respect, yes, social chameleon.'*

Pan's concluding process of his understanding of his adoption and how it has affected his choices in his life and in turn his sexuality is twofold, *'It's not like if I hadn't been adopted I'd be gay, having been adopted has experienced how I've discovered it or decided it or am exploring it. I feel like if I hadn't been adopted I might have been in some ways a lot more open to exploring these things because I would have felt a lot more comfortable with being who I wanted to be instead of having to fit in but then on the same side I might have found it more difficult to explore because less of a need.'*

The process of adoption for Pan has been a 'double edged sword', it has given him the means or desire to create a self/identity that perhaps wouldn't have been there if he wasn't adopted, yet it has also left him with a deep vulnerability and pain, *'actually a deep*

*well of pain*, that has informed his decisions and relationships in his life and led to social conformity on his ‘path of least resistance’.

#### 5.2.4 Eva’s story

Eva is a woman in her late forties who identifies as lesbian. She is in a happy secure long-term relationship with a woman. She has two adult daughters and enjoys being a mum. Eva has limited contact with her daughters’ father.

Eva’s poem (see **Table 9**):

**Table 9 - Eva's poem**

Sexual Spectrum
If only she’d loved me the way I wanted
If only she’d let me be
He was far away, they nurtured a gap between all of us, can you see
I need a mum, I needed a family, and I needed to have something of my own
He offered me love, security and a place so I could be a mum
My daughter was so sure; she knew before me, we had an inkling when she was but three
This could have been me, I could have known, if she’d loved me and let me be me
I always liked women, I always knew deep inside
But somehow it got pushed right down and needed time to find its own way out
She offers me love, she offers me warmth, and she fulfils a deep need in me
Am I looking for mum, maybe in some way I am but it isn’t everything that makes me, me
Many roles I’ve played to fit in, a wife was strange but mother is as natural as can be,
A lesbian I am, if that’s what they see, although is it all that I am?
At times it still hurts, at times it feels hard, to be who I want to be.
I like my life now; I like my place now with the women that make me feel at ease.
There is a scale, there is fluidity in one’s sexual journey through life, but it’s more than just sex, it’s more than just touch
It’s linked in with everything that’s made me, a process I question with love.

What was noticeable at the start and during the interview with Eva was her doubting sense of feeling unsure about her sexuality and how she presented to other people. Although Eva was willing and wanted to engage in the interview, she was hesitant around the subject of her sexuality, with the only aspect she did seem confident with was her belief that human sexuality is on a scale/spectrum that can change. This did however



contradict Eva's statements when she referred to her sense of being a lesbian as an innate aspect of herself.

The three main themes that emerged in the analysis were: *sexual uncertainty*, *feminine stereotypes*, and the questioning of *What did I do?*. *Sexual uncertainty* was prominent throughout the interview, as was *feminine stereotypes* that Eva identified with and the roles that accompanied this in her life. Eva's questioning of *What did I do?* relates to her abusive childhood and her desperate questioning and need to understand why she experienced the things that she had in her adoptive family.

The *sexual uncertainty* of Eva was questioned with a sense of humour, even her identity as a lesbian, '*I'm attracted to women. But am I a lesbian, I don't know (laughing).*' She even questioned if at some point she'd 'go back' to being a heterosexual, '*I wonder if I'd ever go back the other way and I'll never-say-never. And maybe that's my hesitation.*'

This led into her stating that she believed sexuality is fluid, '*I think its fluid, yes with sexuality. I think there's a spectrum and you can move along that spectrum through life.*' The underlining factor that determined Eva's uncertainty stemmed from her not wanting to be categorised by others, '*I don't like to label myself.*' Yet even though Eva believed there is a sexuality scale and even questioned her going back to heterosexuality, she did contradict this with her belief that she was born a lesbian, '*I'd say I sway more towards being a lesbian, and I think that's how it's always been but I just didn't realise it.*' Eva does take into account social influence but still stands firm with being a lesbian, '*I suppose with a lot of stuff that goes on in your life that can influence you as well. But looking back and thinking about it, I think I always was gay but didn't even consider it.*'

The pain and sadness of Eva's themed question of *what did I do?* resonates with the uncertainty and doubt of the subject of sexuality; Eva's childhood lacked the basic needs of love and nurturing, '*I wasn't allowed to be myself. I had quite a rough time. It didn't work very well. I didn't think my adoptive parents had the ability to bond and care for adoptive children, as*

*some people can, or they weren't aware of the issues involved. (Long sigh).'* This stemmed into moments of abuse, *'My mum was quite cruel really. I wasn't really allowed to develop naturally, as a child to just be. She would get very angry.'*

Due to what she lacked in her childhood, Eva was keen to make up for this with her own children and adopt the archetypal mum role with the theme *feminine stereotypes*, *'That was my main goal. I wanted to be a good mum. Yeah, the daughters are not too far away, they visit me, it's the main thing in my life is to be there for them.'* This was confirmed with the belief that being a mum was intrinsically Eva, *'being a mum was me, yeah and that came naturally to me.'*

Although there were questions regarding Eva's sexuality and choice of being with a woman, even questioning if she was with a woman to find some replacement nurturing and love that she didn't receive from her birth mum, *'am I looking for a mother figure is that why I'm with women, you know. Maybe there is that part because my partners very caring she's a bit older than me, is that need being fulfilled. I don't know.'* The overarching impression that came from Eva and the interview process was her question around an innate sexuality and how this may have developed if she had had a nurturing and accepting upbringing.

Eva believed that she was born a lesbian and it was due to the lack of love and meeting of her needs that arrested this innate sexuality within her. *'I think if I'd been with my birth family and there had been bonding and comfortableness there, I would have known earlier that I was gay and been able to express that. You know, all the work I would have done around it as a teenager and worked it all out, I think if I'd been with an adoptive family where (pause) the children were able to be themselves. So, I think it has played a big part, I think I would have been more aware of it younger, if I'd been in a more secure place where I'd been able to know who I was.'*

### 5.2.5 Cathy's story

Cathy is a woman in her early fifties. She is single but has had short to mid-term relationships with men and women since she became sexually active in her later teens. Over the last ten years Cathy has focused her energies into her work, with the outcome of her sexual life lying 'dormant'. Through the process of analysis, it was a natural process to complete two poems for Cathy. The two titles of 'hidden self' and 'my body', yet connected to the whole were clearly differentiated by Cathy in her understanding of herself.

Cathy's poems (see **Tables 10 & 11**):

**Table 10 - Cathy's poem 1**

<b>Hidden Self</b>
<b>When I sit and stare, who do I see? Where am I? What is me?</b>
<b>I stay hidden, it's safe that way</b>
<b>They cannot harm me or judge me away</b>
<b>If I was to shout out for just one second to get in touch with that part of me that is missing!</b>
<b>Mum, I love you so</b>
<b>Your chest and arms embrace me, of which I longed for so long ago</b>
<b>My sisters are fun they let me be me, provocative and sexy that's how I wish to be seen</b>
<b>She was scared the other one, suppressed me and chastised my acts</b>
<b>She couldn't accept my need for intimacy or the need of another's caress</b>
<b>He loved me and I know this to be true, honesty saved me and helped me love him too</b>
<b>Contradiction in me, strong to be feminine, my career is honorable, helpful and positive worth I gain</b>
<b>But is it enough? Why do I question myself once again?</b>
<b>Moments of bliss, silence in self, fleeting reminders of a consistency I don't have</b>
<b>The core of me, my foundation of life; elusive she seems, hiding deep inside</b>
<b>Will I find you? Will I ever be complete? Only time will tell, when the resolve to be all of me is free</b>

**Table 11 - Cathy's poem 2**

<b>My body</b>
<b>She is caught up in their world</b>
<b>They sell the image, of which I once conformed</b>
<b>But how does it feel now, when I'm not the picture</b>
<b>How does it feel now, when I want so much more</b>
<b>My body is me, my body is sex</b>
<b>The intimacy of connection that overwhelming caress</b>
<b>Will he touch me? Will she care?</b>

Will they enshroud me in a seductive shame?  
My body is beautiful, my body is ok  
My sexuality eludes me, my identity is frayed  
Dormant she lies, dormant she sleeps  
Is the core of me separate from those others' beliefs?  
Let me embrace me, let me be free  
Let me excite me for the other to see  
In that moment I'm accepted, in that moment I'm free  
In that moment I'm together, in that moment I'm complete

It became quite apparent with Cathy during her interview that her understanding of her identity and her sexuality were linked; yet clearly separated between her physical body and the abstract concept of a self. She seemed unclear about who she was, and was still searching to gain a deeper understanding of herself and how this related to her being adopted and her birth family. Cathy's understanding of her sexuality and sexual activity is presented through her body and the detached sense she feels to her body and her sexuality at this time.

This translated into Cathy's themes: *sexual attitude* with Cathy's questioning and statements regarding the subject of her sexuality and how this relates to her. This is accompanied with the theme of *finding me* and the elusiveness this entails, but at times with recognition of herself in her birth family, although fear of intimacy blocks her deeper journey into self.

Cathy's *sexual attitude* linked to her body and how this mirrors her sexuality/sexual activity, '*my body is generally in a dormant or protective state because I've put on a lot of weight on over the last decade and I'm probably less active than I've ever been - it's not kind of completely disappeared off the face of the earth but it probably is as dormant as my sexuality.*'

The relationship with Cathy's adoptive mother had a bearing on Cathy's sexuality as a woman, '*I remember once my adoptive mother, and this was really close to when she died, indicated to me that she knew I was sexually active and she called me a slut or some similar term.*'

This derogatory term was also related to Cathy's birth mother, *'I was hurt by what she had called me. It was an awful conversation and I felt very ashamed. I am sure she thought I was following in my mother's footsteps. It seemed to me that in her eyes anything to do with sexuality was dirty stuff.'*

This connected to Cathy's questioning of acceptance and sex and how the two have been intertwined within her life, *'When I was younger I was quite promiscuous and had lots of different sexual partners. I didn't have any problems with having sex with people but I think that was just because I was seeking acceptance and sex was one way to get it.'* This also connected to how Cathy received love, *'I did have sex and love quite mixed up.'*

Cathy does recognize her fear of intimacy and getting emotionally and psychologically close to the other, although there is a desire to move beyond this to gain healthy relationships, *'I now want a sexual relationship that is within an intimate relationship. You don't have to be married to have sex - if I wanted to I could just go out and have one night stands to get sex but that's actually not what I'm interested in, I am more interested in breaking through that barrier of fear of intimacy and having a healthy relationship.'*

The need to break through the barrier of intimacy and get closer to the other resonated with Cathy's need and desire with the theme *finding me* on a deeper core level, *'You know I'm pretty sure that I'm a good person and I know I'm efficient. I'm smart in my career and I'm a good friend so that feels solid but there's also part of me that feels like it could all crumble so easily and that there's still so much more to be discovered. The foundations don't feel solid.'*

However, Cathy does find a sense of self through her relationships with her birth family, *'personally I believe more in nature than nurture because everything fell into place when I went through my reunion, it all made sense.'* There were definite similarities to her birth mother too, *'thought things like 'oh my god my mum is such a loud mouth' and then 'oh yeah that's me too'! It was great - meeting my Mum was amazing and I looked more like her than my two half-sisters.'*

The birth family identifiers are there and at times Cathy connects briefly to this core, but it quickly disappears into an elusiveness, *‘Very occasionally I feel that incredible peaceful feeling where there’s no static, no tension and it comes out of the blue and I can’t work out why. It feels so elusive and fleeting.’*

Cathy relates this barrier to intimacy through her attachment issues and how they also block her connection to her sexuality and sexual life, *‘the blocks are my attachment issues and fear of intimacy and vulnerability. The expression of my sexuality is suppressed by those blocks.’*

Cathy’s need to be close and develop ‘healthy relationships’ is a definite goal she is striving for. She was glad for the opportunity to be interviewed and to check the transcript, and how this helped her connect and give time to this ‘dormant’ part of self, *‘Going through this has got me thinking more about this side of myself so thank you very much for facilitating that!’*

### 5.2.6 Noel’s story

Noel is a man in his sixties and is a widower. Noel now lives alone and has two adult children, a daughter and a son. He was previously in voluntary work and is looking to get back into this. Noel vaguely talked about his sexuality, he focused more on his adoption and the experience of this through his life. Noel categorised himself as heterosexual.

Noel’s poem (see **table 12**):

**Table 12 - Noel's poem**

<b>He Hurt Me He Did</b>
<b>The tyrant, he hurt me he did</b>
<b>The tyrant would beat me and my sister, he did</b>
<b>He never loved us or showed us any care</b>
<b>I hated the tyrant; he should never have had us, this I declare</b>
<b>I never needed to question it, I would say I’m a normal heterosexual</b>

I'm not rejecting of other sexual orientations, am I?
I've just never needed to question mine
Although, saying that, my birth mother was a lesbian
And she never wanted to see or meet me
Makes me question what went on: was she raped?
I don't have much confidence, and I find it hard to trust
That fear of rejection, from you or another, is torturous
I've always been with women that need me, you see
They are incapacitated, physically challenged, they can't 'do'
I always need to feel useful and to help is the best that I do
But saying that, If they dishonour me, then cut them dead I will
Is it to do with the adoption, I'm pretty sure it is still
My identity is wrapped up in my kids and the women I've loved
But then I was always different from the moment they took me home
It is hard to be me, I needed to feel safe
It is hard to be me, I'm really quite scared
I trust my kids and I trusted my wives
I wanted to trust my birth family
And yet it is still shrouded in lies
The never knowing, they are the silent words
The never knowing, that is what really hurts

From the moment we started and all the way through to the end of the interview Noel focused the subject around his experience of adoption and his relationship to his

adoptive parents and the people in his life. Noel gave a clear timeline to his interview starting at his birth and moving systematically through his life, presenting his life story.

Even though at times I prompted Noel with the 5 sub questions (see **section 3.5.2**) and referring to sexuality and sexual identity, Noel only briefly touched on this. The title of Noel's poem 'He Hurt Me He Did' refers to his relationship with his adoptive father and how this has played a significant part in Noel's low self-esteem and low self-worth throughout his life and through all the relationships he shared with me. This is translated into the theme *fear of the other* that was highlighted throughout the interview process.

Noel experienced abusive behaviour from his father as did Noel's sister, *'Well not just me, my sister as well. We both got it. He was a bit of a drinker, well he wasn't a bit of a drinker, he was a lot of a drinker which didn't help. Often when he'd had a few drinks, he was heavy-handed more than he would be sober.'* This resulted in Noel having physical signs of his abuse and his justifying it as a generational time, *'often we would go to school covered in welts and bruises and all the rest of it, but back then again, it was accepted.'*

His adoptive father still had a powerful influence in Noel's life up until the time he died, *'when you've had it put into you until my adopted father died when I was – well he died in 2002, I was getting on for 50 then, so for those 50 years, he pumped it into me what a waste of space I was and even though I was an adult and I could make my own choices, his overbearing still ruled my life.'*

The fear of the other also came through in Noel's identifying as a heterosexual and his being seen as attractive or intimately engaged with a person of the same sex, *'I have got nothing against gay people, you know whatever their sexual orientation is, that's entirely up to them....as long as they don't push it in my face.'*

The need to follow rules and abide by others was also prevalent in Noel's first profession, *'I joined the Navy.'* The need to keep others happy and people please, Noel connected this to his being an adoptee and the vulnerability of not feeling accepted, *'that's*



*the sort of thing with adoptees that they do on the whole, they strive to keep other people happy to make themselves feel better. That is the way I certainly led my life. In my relationships, I had to feel the need to be needed.'*

Regarding Noel's sexuality and sexual identity, this was an unquestioned part of his life which was taken for granted, *'I suppose the word in itself is the basic meaning to me, is when somebody says, "what sexuality have you got? Are you gay, are you heterosexual, are you bisexual or all that." And my answer to that would be heterosexual.'*

Noel's identity was clearly tied into his feelings of low self-worth and his negative picture of himself, *'how do I see me? I don't feel attractive to other people. It's this lack of self-esteem again, this feeling of worthlessness. I look in a mirror and I think, oh, who's going to want to go out with me. It's a physical thing, I think. I've got nothing to offer them. So there's a great deal of insecurity in that, in the way I am.'*

A strong sense of identity for Noel also came from having children and seeing the physical similarities, *'I think when I had my kids and in turn, my grandkids, yes my son when I had a photograph of me at four years old, and a photograph of my son at four years old, we were identical, and if you took a photograph of my eldest grandson, when he was four years old, we are identical. You know you can definitely say that's granddad, that's dad and that's grandson. It's there.'*

Compared to some of the other participants, and also the researcher, Noel never got to meet his adoptive mother. He did try to contact her, but she wanted nothing to do with him. He had contact with his birth aunt but his birth mother refused to meet with Noel, *'my birth mother was totally against it and she almost, from what I understand, she almost held my aunt to ransom to say if you have anything more to do with him, I will cut you out, so unfortunately that was how the double jeopardy came in.'*

This caused Noel mixed feelings and even raised questions to the reasons behind his adoptive mum's rejection and sexual orientation, *'As far as I was concerned she was in a*

*lesbian relationship and whether that was anything – it makes me wonder whether maybe I was the result of a rape or something, which turned her against me.'*

This left Noel with unanswered questions and feelings of pain in the process of never knowing, *'I just don't know. These are the missing questions that – I don't necessarily want a relationship with my birth family. I would just like to know how some of it is answered. Just so you can put a closure on it and know.'* Noel used the metaphor of writing a book to demonstrate the missing pieces in his life, *'you could write a book about the adoption. Okay, if I write a book, chapter one is going to be missing or the first few pages are going to be missing because I don't know what they are. It would be nice just to have that knowledge of where the first 9 months, when I was in the womb, came from.'*

When Noel discussed his birth father, he showed complete indifference to him, which makes one question if his abusive relationship with his adoptive father, and the fear of the other, has influenced Noel's unimportance to search for him, *'I've never wanted to investigate it. He's not on my birth certificate so, without going through my mother and getting his name from her, I couldn't do much about it anyway. No, I've never sort of pined or thought I'll look and wonder who my father was. It wouldn't be a big excitement; I don't feel anything for my father, total indifference.'*

### **5.2.7 Marty's story**

Marty is a man in his forties and is married to a woman. Marty has a history of therapy and the theoretical concepts applied to counselling and psychotherapy. Marty categorised himself as heterosexual. Within Marty's analysis four colours naturally came through in the poetic structuring, prose, and representation of the themes in Marty's interview, these are presented in four colour narrative passages in Table 13:

Table 13 - Marty's poem

In Search of the Archetypal Feminine
<p>Red the answer to the sexual energies that flowed through the interview. The confusion and fear of the out of control post-pubescent child. The desire to engulf to overpower the feminine to take back the power lost. The Anger of repressed feelings of Shame and hurt from the separation. The denial of pain. The use of sexual disguise and identity to fulfil the craving of the need to complete, to join, to be as one, but yet more than this, too hurt and shame the mother for abandoning us.</p>
<p>Blue the sadness of the loss. The cold pain of separation. The tears of icy blue crystals that cascaded from our wanting eyes. The devotion of the Pathos of the ever-searching child, the adult looking for the mother in every woman, yet is deluded as she eludes him. Embodied recognition of a deep Well of pain; a pain realised, a pain that is eternal, a pain never ending.</p>
<p>Purple the iconic woman, the divine. An archetypal presence, unattainable through ritual. A rite of passage missed. Missed through the premature separation of body and soul. Where are you mum? Yet you are not either of these things, you are beyond me. You are omnipresent in divinity. I must gaze upon the vision to complete my journey, understanding, integrate become one with the divine feminine – Love the divine feminine, respect the divine archetype. Only she alone can tame my wild desires, my ecstasy, and the uncontrollable energy of the child becoming a man.</p>
<p>Green is the Other. Not only the Other in my eyes but the Other of my reflection. You mirror my thoughts and mirror my actions. You want me to conform to be a 'good boy'. How can I be a 'good boy'? Am I doing something wrong? The self-disgust of my shame. The Other admonishes me, the gaze of disapproval. The nodding of the head. The glaring of the eyes. I must please them, console them, and let them feel safe in my existence. I am not theirs, but am grateful for their kindness. They took me in and cared for me. They helped me survive. The conflicting messages of media, the socially acceptable iconic image of the experienced Older woman, and yet I still feel embarrassed and shameful in the gaze of society. I feel self-disgust I critique myself, vigilant monitor, easier to do, it keeps them away. Distance, safe in my own world, then they won't see my sexuality, my desire for the older woman, my need for the older woman, my need for my mother.</p>

The ‘*search for the archetypal feminine*’ and how this is presented became the central theme within our interview together. There were similar processes and identifiers between Marty and the researcher through the process of the interview. This led to a dialogical encounter (see **section 3.5.3**) and the co-creation of the interview and our time together, making sense of our adoptive experience and how our sexuality has been influenced by this experience. This is also presented with the theme *searching for the feminine - Older Woman*, and related to the two themes that were created and became apparent with Marty’s interview, his *self-stigmatising* and how his body communicated to him - *body speaking*.

Marty’s *searching for the feminine* resulted in him feeling he was actually separated from women per se and directly linked to his adoption, ‘*Being separated from my birth mother at birth or at few weeks old, you know not having a sense of that bond anymore or sense of the bond being ruptured, So the idea that this bond with the feminine has been broken*’, Marty believed this also affected his relationship to women, ‘*and so I feel like it does affect me and my motivation and the way I behave towards women, or have behaved towards women.*’

This is connected to the theme *body speaking*, and how this separation has been communicated to Marty, ‘*I’ll never get over the very physical level I’ll never get over that loss.*’ The physical communication of Marty’s body also spoke after he had had a reunion with his birth mother and she then once again broke contact with him, ‘*When my birth mother just broke contact like that with no explanation I just had this incredible pain here. Sort of around my naval and for a long time I was in genuine physical pain and I would be vomiting, so for a week I was just vomiting bile.*’

The need for Marty to connect to women, especially older women and find a resolve for his separation came through in his sexuality with a strong sexual attraction to older women, that had played out and still does play out within his life, ‘*She’s a bit older by 10 years and umm quite prim and proper and again there’s a challenge...I couldn’t bring myself to go*

*behind my wife's back, but I know that attraction is there and it's about seducing the older rather prim woman.'* This sexual attraction to the older woman has even influenced his sexual relationships with his younger wife, *'I think I struggle sexually with my wife. That's not her fault that's me and my makeup of being attracted, animated towards older women. It's very challenging to be sexually intimate with my wife sometimes because it really kind of gets rid of all those fantasies.'*

Although Marty recognised and enjoyed his fantasy of the older woman, there was an overall shame and self-disgust that went with this attraction, *'at the same time still feeling ashamed still ashamed of myself. Still ashamed of my sexuality, it's almost like I want some kind of permission for somebody to say it's okay, it's okay to have that sexuality.'*

Marty connects this attraction to older women, as an aspect of his childhood, a possible lost childhood, *'there is a more powerful element for me as an adoptee, that the sexual relationships with an older woman is something about the child, there was something about the child in that for me.'* This lost aspect of childhood, of relationship, with the mother is seen and made sense of through the loss of an initiation rite, or rite of passage, *'the child in me it's something very different but I think they are connected and I do believe it is based on me evolving or as a person without my birth mother there. And I believe that point, if a child goes through puberty with a woman who isn't his birth mother then some sort of necessary separation that has to happen, when the child becomes sexual, doesn't take place.'*

Marty confirms this through his sexual arousal of when he met his birth mother for the first time, *'that's the most satisfying explanation I've ever had for becoming sexually aroused when I met my birth mother. That we had never gone through that organic unconscious separation that mother and son need to go through when the son becomes a sexual being.'* The loss of this initiation rite then left a misdirect of energy that Marty interpreted as primal sexual energy that needed to be constructively directed, *'it's about helping the young man contain his*

*sexuality contain his ability to be violent or caring or be creative, it's about all those things, it's about trying to help people make the right space for their energies.'*

An anger and deep well of pain existed for Marty due to this loss of mother and halted cultural rite of passage, *'it feels like desperation sometimes. Because it's painful, it feels painful that's how it feels for me on a darker side of that sometimes there's only anger that comes with that.'* At times Marty even feels the power of this translated through his sexuality that he will even be consumed by it, *'I think that's what gives sexuality that broody fearsome potency is the anger. That does feel like it's going to eat me alive.'*

The attainment of the mother figure for Marty through the loss of his rite of passage has turned his mother figure into an idol, a divine untouchable figure, *'I think to some degree I am still in denial about my anger towards her, because, yeah everyone else got it all the time. She was this sacred woman you know. That could do no wrong in my eyes; to all intents and purposes it was she that struck the mortal blow if that's the right way of putting it. The anger I had lots of people say that you're really angry with your mum. And I'm like no I'm not. But really, I kind of got to see that I am. But underneath it's been hard for me to access the anger, really hard because there is a big sense of protecting her almost like I'm sacrificing myself.'*

The self-sacrificing has manifested itself in Marty's critical approach to life, towards others for self-protection but more so toward his attacking of self, *'So what have I got to defend myself with... anger. Yeah! Suddenly becomes get someone to back off be critical of them. Being a perfectionist, it's the critical. That's destructive, I found. Every interaction it's just like okay walk away from it rewind, did you make the other person feel good. You know could you have said this instead, every little conversation micro-analysing.'*

The final parting words and what was unique to Marty's interview, compared to the other participants, was Marty's explicit communication of his isolation of being an adoptee, *'I get a very strong sense of loneliness at times. Even now just saying the word fills me with dread. I think that's the worst thing really the sense of isolation.'* The interview process did

give Marty a sense of connection and an opportunity to leave that space of isolation and engage with another fellow adoptee (the researcher) with Marty expressing his appreciation, *‘I feel like it's been really useful for me to break the silence. With you I think that loneliness that fear, those walls that we build around isolation. Really rejuvenating to kind of trust that I'll be able to say things and you'll get it.’* This reciprocal experience was likewise appreciated by the researcher.

### 5.2.8 Kim's story

Kim is a married woman in her forties and lives in the north of England. She has three children and works as a drama teacher. Kim categorises herself as heterosexual.

Kim's poem (see **Table 14**):

**Table 14 - Kim's poem**

<b>My Mother's from Liverpool</b>
<b>It started with a look, a picture to create</b>
<b>An image that I could call my home</b>
<b>My mum was cold regarding sex, she didn't really share</b>
<b>Although they were good parents, living conformist lives, did I care?</b>
<b>I'm always rooting for the underdog, always looking how to help</b>
<b>Could I find my acceptance through them, could I find recognition for Self</b>
<b>Famous, famous on the stage, if Mr Spielberg came along...</b>
<b>Is it related to my adoption, the links have now begun</b>
<b>My daughter holds a mirror large, of questions I can no longer hide</b>
<b>I wonder what she looks like, could I find myself inside her mind</b>
<b>Scared I am at this point in time, maybe in the future I'll make the step</b>
<b>At the moment, I'll stay quite comfortable as safety is the best bet</b>

On the fringe, at the edge, not a place in contemporary society
A vulnerable side, don't we all have, a fear of never knowing
My sexual side, a sexual identity that is forever forth coming
My missing piece is with them both, but her I guess is more
I need to know but courage escapes in this safety I call my home
A hippie age, a loving gaze, of flowers was definitely more hip
Orientation jumps to mind but more to sexuality there is
For me identity, intimacy and acceptance come strongly to the mix
I found my identity in others first but now I want more of me
Conforming to stereotypes is not my bag, emancipation I want to be free
In all of this I find myself, in relationships I always needed
And yet link to link, mother to daughter, her grandmother still is waiting.
The critical me, the me that can't hear...
What positive? There you see
A vulnerable side that stays hidden, I can never really let them see
So I play a part, fulfil a role, a character in a play
Movie star I wish I was, a famous actress on the stage
But why is that, I hear you ask, is it to be liked and to feel accepted?
My mother, I wonder who she is, do I look anything like her?
I'd like to know, but fear the search of possible rejection
In my daughter I see, parts of me, an identity that is acceptable
For me I wear my image large, off the peg I can create it
A sexual image was never my thing, I didn't need that attention
I got it through the helpful turn and fighting for the underdog



**I'm insecure I guess I am, I don't really feel that competent**

**My missing part is held by her, that history will restore it**

**But to keep them safe, and myself included, I'm still not sure with the searching**

Kim takes her heterosexuality as a taken for granted aspect of herself. She's never really questioned it, or needed to throughout her life. She's always had a strong attraction to males, and the only time she's considered same-sex relations was in her teens, and puts this down to teenage curiosity, *'In terms of sexuality, I don't think I've ever particularly struggled or wondered. I mean there are times in your life where you experiment a bit more, perhaps you know, in your teens. I think me and this girl had a bit of a snog once and it was a bit of a laugh – we were drunk – I think I was actually going out with a guy at the time, you know so I don't think there was any kind of "I wonder if I'm actually a lesbian or not".'*

In respect to her identity, this has always been tied into her role as an activist fighting for the underdog, taking her into alternative ways of dressing, for example being a hippie<sup>28</sup>. There is also a sense of Kim actively creating her image and playing a role that links to her interest and job role as a drama teacher.

When we look at Kim's themes this correlates to the theme of *What's my part?* The theme *What's sex got to do with it?* Links to Kim's taken for granted sexuality and how she understands herself in relation to this subject.

Identifying with minority groups and becoming an activist started young for Kim, *'I recognised that from quite early on and I'm talking about being a young teenager. I had pictures of Nelson Mandela – I used to have a 'Free Nelson Mandela' badge and Martin Luther King*

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<sup>28</sup> According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary: a hippie is usually a young person who rejects established social customs (such as by dressing in an unusual way or living in a commune) and who opposes violence and war; *especially* : a young person of this kind in the 1960s and 1970s (see <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hippie>)

*posters, which is a bizarre thing to have, like a child with this big picture in your bedroom and I'm not even black – identifying with a civil rights' leader.'*

The need to be useful and seen as helpful, linked to the activist role, was also mirrored in the jobs Kim has had throughout her life, *'It's interesting the jobs I've gone into as well, starting as a nurse, that was my first career but not just a general nurse – a mental health nurse, you know. Before that I worked with homeless people, so that was my first job when I left home, working with homeless people, then I went into mental health nursing, then went into more drama based, using drama as a therapy doing theatre with a lot of health promotion stuff, through drama, alcohol awareness, teenage pregnancy, that kind of thing – anti-bullying – going into schools doing plays about that kind of stuff, then teaching and now I'm working in a school for boys with social emotional behaviour problems who are – loads in foster care and I'm doing one-to-one kind of nurture groups, so it's funny isn't it, that I've picked those paths all the time and gone into them.'*

Kim's identity, although interconnected to her roles, has a process of 'play' and acting, a choice to be made, *'I can remember actually making a choice – actually saying I've decided to be a hippy – I have decided! I mean, people don't do that do they? You just choose what clothes you wear, you are influenced probably by your friends and your social group, but I can remember actually making an informed choice – how do I want to be? So I guess I was making a choice about my identity in a very controlled kind of weighing up now, do I want to look like this or do I want to look like that.'*

Kim's identity and dramatic persona plays out in her ability to daydream and fantasise about her life with the need to be seen and acknowledged, *'I've always, always wanted to be famous – that's all I've wanted, and that sometimes is a massive part of my identity as well. I always wanted to be an actress, always wanted to be famous and tried to go to drama school – didn't get in and then went and studied drama instead and set up my own – but I always sort of looked back, until recently actually, looked back and go "if I'd have done what I really wanted to do, which was to be a famous actress" and again it's my husband – he's a very grounded person and*

said “yes, but the things that you always have, the kids that you have taught and setting something up in the community – you know I go round and other teenagers will go hiya, hiya and it’s like you might not be world famous but you are well-known, people know you and will remember you and kids on Facebook, friends with young adults who I taught drama when they were little, they are like – they kind of look up, they go how are you? It’s really nice that you’re doing that and it makes you kind of proud to see what they’re doing.’

Even though there is grounding in her reality of community based projects and the positive influence she has on her community, the fantasy never diminishes, ‘although I’m not famous, I am quite infamous, although I’m not famous. I’m less worried about that now, however if Steven Spielberg turned up and said “do you want to be in this film?” I’d say yes!’

As already stated sexuality for Kim is in her heterosexuality, although she doesn’t see sexuality as a strong signifier, ‘in terms of growing up, I don’t think it was something that I thought about in terms of defining me.’ For Kim, sex and sexuality is based in self-expression and again Kim links it to image and how you present self, ‘Sexuality is about you as a person and how you express yourself and stuff like that and certainly I’ve never been somebody who’s been comfortable dressing in a very provocative or sexy in inverted commas, that’s not been mine that’s not been how I’ve ever functioned, and I think that’s all linked with sexuality.’

For all of Kim’s outward expression and dramatic persona, her vulnerability and need for acceptance was recognised within our interview time, ‘it’s about not being judged. Just recently, I felt like, you know, people you grow up with – you make friends with people because your kids are friends and you suddenly find that they are not like you really...I know I can list three very close friends, know they are that same kind of mentality...you don’t feel you are being judged.’

However, this still doesn’t stop Kim’s critical voice and self-doubt, ‘I sent a text to the girl to say “thanks for a lovely day, I’ve had a really nice time” and I didn’t hear anything back and I thought “I’ve done something wrong” and I spent all Thursday thinking what did I say that upset her? I was convinced that basically I’ve pissed them off. Anyway, I got home and she’d emailed

*me on Facebook – sorry I have no phone signal but I’ve got wifi and the same message – we had a lovely day, and I thought I’m so stupid.’*

What is interesting with Kim’s interview and analysis is her multiplicity of roles which intertwines with her acting and drama profession, and how she has made a conscious decision throughout her life to create her identity. When we relate this to her adoption and her fear of finding her birth family, Kim still does acknowledge that her identity and deeper understanding of self is intrinsically related to this process, *‘Your identity is something really important and I think until I’ve been through the process of looking for who my biological parents are and a bit more information about that, I don’t think my identity will be fully complete. I think I need to do that at some point and I know I will, but just not yet.’*

### 5.2.9 David’s story

David is man in his early forties, and has been happily married for the last few years. He does not have any children, and is planning not to have any. David’s profession is in the performing arts with his wife. David categorises himself as heterosexual.

David’s poem (see **Table 15**):

**Table 15 - David's poem**

<b>Playing with fantasy</b>
<b>Distance is a game I play. Distance is an arm length away.</b>
<b>To hold onto the man that is me. If they get to close, they will infiltrate my space;</b>
<b>I will lose all there is to be me.</b>
<b>Play away, play away, are the words that linger on.</b>
<b>You hurt me mother. You hurt me mum. You nearly destroyed that little boy.</b>
<b>They lived happily ever after, the story books say, but what about me?</b>
<b>I was lost in a strange little place, so create it from scratch, can’t you see?</b>

"Hello", I'd say, "Hello, I'm me; would you like to be my friend?"
I'd pray they'd say, yes, I'd pray they'd say, ok, I'd hope they'd liked me for me.
But as I grew, as things started to grow, a bizarre new game appeared.
I could get my needs met, through a physical touch, and then walk away feeling ok.
Sex was the game, emotional I'm not sure, but physical the feeling felt.
I guess it was? They told me it hurt; they said I was terribly cold.
But my scales always felt right. I gave more than I took; we definitely got pleasure and love.
Well that's how it felt. But looking back, distance was the game I brought;
My heart stayed away, my connections stayed back; I wasn't going to get hurt.
Mum had done this, but never again, no woman would do this again.
So I played the Don Juan, I played the poor child, to manipulate my absolution of blame.
But then...believe it or not, I found love at last I could trust.
Like me she was, together we were, nothing could keep us apart.
She felt the same. Like peas in a pod, it really wasn't that hard.
Although deep inside, the beast I do hide. Of him I can't let him come up.
He torments the women, he dominates theirs lives. He hates her for what she did.
Forgiveness I want, forgiveness I seek. But will I ever feel free of his pain.
Revenge feels so hard, revenge feels so bleak. But can I ever have it any other way?
A man I might be, but woman inside, I torture the feminine me.
I long to be loved, I long for us both, so I can nurture and finally be free.

David initially presented himself as a 'ladies' man'. He found women desirable as sexual objects, and disclosed his sexual promiscuity throughout his life, *'I mean I had already*

*started by the time I'd got to 18, it was like okay, let's see what havoc we can create! What fun can we have? I was like a child in a sweetie shop and my sexual partners went up probably 3 or 4-fold.'* Although he was keen to show an innocence in his actions, and for it not to be seen as sexual predatory behaviour, *'But there was never really any maliciousness behind it, you know, it was not a Don Giovanni scenario where you are sort of going, I've got my little black book and I want to tick them all off!'* This perceived innocent promiscuity and need to connect to women is seen in the theme *play*.

For David his life had been a constant need to play games and live in fantasy which translated into the sex game, *'you're just investigating things and I was always playing with cars and soldiers and that sort of thing in my own little world. So that was just another extension of, okay, this is where the sex story goes for me. You know, you only have to see something on TV at 9 or 10 to think, Oh, I can re-enact that.'*

The role of *play* for David also translated into his chosen profession within the performing arts and how his sexuality performed within this, *'if you are creative, if you are slightly bohemian and you've got an imagination. It's full of sexual energy all around and quite liberating, you know, in that sense. It doesn't have the structure of an office. It doesn't have that – you can't sleep with your co-workers, you know.'*

David acknowledges the opportunistic environment of the theatre world and his actions towards others, *'Well, after a show, you come down, you're having a few drinks and, of course, something might happen, you know – it invariably does. So, yes, there is an element of that and, I never wanted people to get hurt, even though I did hurt people. I've never been malicious in that sense – cold for my own agenda.'*

The second prominent theme that emerged in David's analysis was *Distance*. David's justifiable behaviour is presented through his distancing of himself, and perceiving others through the lens of aesthetics, *'I like beautiful things – I do and I can find beauty in, you know, I mean some of the women I have been with, other people wouldn't look at them twice, but I*

*found something, in that moment, that's 100% beauty, that I desired and I think that was enough for me.'*

Although David used sex to meet his own needs and find intimacy for self, *'Emotional closeness, I suppose sex is a way of dealing with small intimacies, where talking could no longer go. It bridged emotional closeness by having sex as long as everybody is happy with that scenario.'*

There was fear and vulnerability of relationships and women, that the distancing kept away, *'I'd always had that ability to sort of cut off, you know, a certain time and I cut off. There's a coldness that I think it's self-preservation. It's like why should I have something as negative as you in my life.'*

David connected this ability to 'cut people off' to his adoption, *'I think it gives you the ability to do that because you are - I think for me, it's the ability to sort of just go you're not important to me anymore. It's quite clinical. It is quite cold for someone you think is a warm person.'*

The need to *distance* and *play* correlate to the control and rules of David's games in his adapting life of the adoptee as social chameleon, *'I think it's choice but being able to play again that word - the social chameleon - within a structured family or a family structure. I think it gave me the ability to play with emotions like that, for me.'*

The adaptation was apparent with David, although his ability to 'cut off' and justify with a dichotomy of feelings played through in his understanding of self, *'it's a black and white thing. I've done you no harm but if we don't end it now, I might and I don't want that on me and I don't want the other on me either.'* There is a clear need to not feel indebted to the other, to give David a clear conscience to walk away and justify his actions, *'Yes, squared off, underlined, thank you very much - see you for a coffee sometime. And I couldn't understand why they would try to avoid me - have a coffee with you? I like you but you're not enough for me anymore, you know. It's been mutual; it's been a mutual split. It sounds horrible when you put it like*

*that. It's like the old adage; you can't live with someone else's emotions. I don't want to hurt you. I haven't hurt you. To me all checks and balances are fine.'*

For all of David's past sexual behaviour and distancing of self from others, he has found love with his wife, *'it sounds really very cheesy but it was love, it was love. An ease, easy – we both wanted the same things...obviously a great unit – a good team. It is a good team. I think that's the more she becomes my family – she is my family.'*

It could be easy to judge David's past behaviour and his sexual actions towards others. Although taking into account's David's traumatic start with his birth mother and his understanding of this, *'Mum was always my Mum and still is, by name and she had a fairly tough time. She was only 17, you know when she had me and she had a lot of issues and my Gran told me some details, that I wasn't sure I really needed to know, but while she was in care of me, she was raped by two men and also she tried to commit suicide and take me with her.'* It does raise the question to David's vulnerability as an adult adoptee and how his traumatic start could have affected the *playing* out of his sexual life and his relationships to others.

### **5.3 Composite Group Depiction**

Figure 5 below represents the reflection of the group composite depiction through the use of a picture collage. The images below present the ten participants, embodying aspects of their personality, sexuality and sexual identity.



Figure 5 - Composite depiction



*Listen:*  
An adoptee can  
feel both happy  
and sad about  
their adoption.



\*Despite fulfilling the definition of one of these identities, a person might not identify with the label. Make sure you check how they identify before making any assumptions.

<b>GAY</b>	refers to any man-identified person who is physically or emotionally attracted to other man-identified people.
<b>LESBIAN</b>	refers to any woman-identified person who is physically or emotionally attracted to other woman-identified people.
<b>BISEXUAL</b>	refers to a person of any gender who is physically or emotionally attracted to people of the same and of other genders than themselves
<b>TRANSGENDER</b>	refers to a person of any gender whose assigned gender doesn't match with their gender identity
<b>TWOSPIRIT</b>	refers to an aboriginal person who fulfills multiple gender roles traditionally found in aboriginal culture
<b>INTERSEX</b>	refers to a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.
<b>PANSEXUAL</b>	refers to a person of any gender who is physically or emotionally attracted to people regardless of gender
<b>ASEXUAL</b>	refers to a person of any gender who lacks sexual attraction or an interest in sex



guardian  
mother  
foster  
consent  
parent  
families  
orphan  
nurture  
services  
duties  
girl  
courts  
birth  
open  
natural  
father



Adoption and the need to hear adoptees is a dominate theme of this thesis, so is present at the top of the picture. Image taken from <http://adopting.org/the-happysad-of-adoption/> [accessed 06/12/16]

Sexuality and the varied orientations are central, anchoring the participants. Image taken from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/302163456220184018/> [accessed 06/12/16]

Adoption as a concept is next to this to show the many varied relationships and dynamics that interplay between the people, groups and organisations involved throughout an adoptee's existence. Image taken from <http://yeattslawfirm.com/independent-adoption/> [accessed 06/12/16]

Kim is represented as the hippie chick, care free, alternative and a force to fight for the underdog and challenge the status quo, *'I can remember actually making a choice – actually saying I've decided to be a hippy – I have decided! It did fit my scheme of the world, that people are equal – I'm probably more left-wing and a little bit more political about stuff.'* Image taken from <https://www.shutterstock.com/search/hippie+girl> [accessed 06/12/16]

Marty is represented from a scene from the 1967 movie 'The Graduate', with Mrs Robinson (Anne Bancroft) and Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman). Benjamin is making love to the older woman, a fantasy and sexuality of Marty. We see the character Benjamin, and perhaps even Marty's perspective as he looks over his shoulder, conscious of the social stigma of being caught and ridiculed for a sexual relationship outside of the heterosexual norm. *'I've always had a strong sexual attraction to older women – but I'm still ashamed of my sexuality.'* Image taken from <http://www.popscreen.com/v/6sluc/Mrs-robinson-du-film-the-graduate> [accessed 06/12/16]

Anna is shown through the orientation of bisexuality and her unfixed position of attraction to either sex. *'I've never actually classed myself as heterosexual. For me, it is all about the person rather than if they are male or female.'* Yet next to Anna there is the image of the vulnerable women, blurred and hiding away in her room, keeping the outside world at bay.



*'Although I'm happy with myself I feel very suppressed. So as before I'd go out, and now I don't bother, and I'm kind of happier at home; it feels very confused...so I don't want to be around other people where I can't be me. So yeah, that's me.'* Image taken from

<https://www.theodysseyonline.com/bisexuality> [accessed 06/12/16]

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/66076319504228104/> [accessed 06/12/16]

Eva is represented as the image of the female lovers embracing and kissing. Eva embraces her lesbian lifestyle, and finds a comfort and warmth through her lesbian culture, partner and friendships. *'I feel a lot happier with myself...and being in this relationship is just better. Yeah I like the gay scene, it's like the girls at L-fest...I feel comfortable there, comfortable in that place. And yeah like I've said I portray, I look gay, it's my identity and I'm happy with it.'* Image taken from

<https://gayeststoreonearth.com/products/mature-lesbian-wedding-cake-topper-with-cascading-crystal-base/> [accessed 06/12/16]

Pan's image is of the androgynous person, neither wanting to be seen as male or female, but presenting one's self as gender neutral. Pan explains that this came from a sense of release and freedom when he started searching for his birth family. *'I've tried to actively become more androgynous, and less overtly masculine. That's come about predominately since I've met my birth family. When I started searching for them and exploring my own identity as more of a fluid thing in life, and then I met them and since then, you know I've considered to grow my hair which I started. I often wear it in plaits or in a bun you know like Willy Nelson pigtails. So that's quite a big outlet for my gender/sexuality. It's difficult to separate sexuality and gender.'* Image taken from

<http://everydayfeminism.com/2016/01/lies-media-tells-androgyny/> [accessed 06/12/16]

David is shown through the icon image of James Bond, the ultimate womaniser, the Don Juan, of modern western times. *'I was like a child in a sweetie shop and my sexual partners went up probably 3 or 4-fold, you know.'* Yet, as with Anna, there is vulnerability. Next to David is the image of the children, representing the vulnerability stemming from a childish/boyish innocence for his need to be with a woman, and even in some way to be close to a mother. *'I*

*craved female contact, as opposed to male... day by day, "I want to be loved". I was always playing with cars and soldiers as a kid in my own little world. So that was just another extension of, okay, this is where the sex story goes for me.'* Image taken from <http://scandinaviangents.com/thelounge/2015/06/09/james-bond-a-womaniser-with-fine-taste/> [accessed 06/12/16] <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/video/little-boy-kissing-girl-dreamy-illustration-stock-footage/473132781> [accessed 06/12/16]

Vox is depicted in the union of two gay men with a converse ironic message to say that straight acting heterosexuals maybe gay. Vox was adamant that he didn't want to have to fit into the westernised stereotype of an effeminate gay man, as he had had to do when he was younger to be accepted as a gay man. *'When I was younger we had to go to gay clubs and gay pride to feel free and comfortable, so in the back of my mind it constantly created inner turmoil and it made it seem like it was something I had to hide, or could only express when I was around others in same situations.* Vox had a need to embrace the westernised straight image to counter the gay stereotype. *'I didn't really start doing guy things until I was out of high school. That's when I really embraced being a guy and started getting into things like car repair mechanics sports etc...* Image taken from <http://whisper.sh/whisper/051653b3490aac558444e967f8e235bc233e4d/Straight-guys-acting-gay> [accessed 06/12/16]

Noel's image is of the angry authoritarian father, overshadowing the child and disciplining them, with a fear of the cycle repeating. Noel expressed in his interview his desire to stop the cycle, *'hopefully I did break the chain, but I did have to step back and have a big think about it – hang on a minute, I lived in fear of my dad, I am now making my kids live in fear of me.'* This was an on-going experience for Noel and his sister growing up; both scared of when their adoptive father would come home, and fearful of what he might do. *'Yes, you lived in fear of 6 o'clock coming when you knew your dad would walk in the door. What mood would he be in and what was going to happen to us and so out of protection both me and my sister, by that time of night*

*when he was coming in, we'd be in our pyjamas, sat on the edge of the chair, perfectly how we were expected to be and we wouldn't whisper a word. I was just frightened of what might happen, - fear I should say, fear of what would happen if we were still playing with toys and we weren't ready for bed, sort of thing.'*

Image taken from <http://aboutislam.net/counseling/ask-the-counselor/domestic-violence/slaves-abusive-father/> [accessed 06/12/16]

Cathy is represented as a woman showing release and a sense of freedom; bursting out through the water. Her arms and body are exploding with life and vitality, expressing and releasing her sexuality and sexual energy. Cathy's upbringing was oppressive of her sexuality and sexual expression, so she desires to be able to explore and be open about her sexual identity. *'I was very attracted to highly sexualized individuals like the kinky rocky horror show types. I had a lot of gay friends who were very open about their sexuality and I always thought that was great that they were so out there. I have thought about how I would love to go to one of those festivals where everyone is naked and just embracing their bodies and sexuality. I am really attracted to that liberation where you can just be who you are and be kinky or out there or whatever makes you happy. That is so the opposite of my upbringing so I think I yearn for that sense of freedom to have that outward expression. I really admire people who are able to do that.'* Image taken from

<http://www.nomoresecretsmbs.org/services> [accessed 06/12/16]

Sam's image is of an ironic sensitive guy, with the humour of the quirky character of Willy Wonker, played by the actor Gene Wilder. The caption says that sensitive guys must have amazing sex lives; and for Sam there was an element of his sensitivity, which he values so much, as a vehicle to assist him in understanding and getting closer to women. *'It's a massive strength and it's certainly is a strength you know, if I'm being candid here; it was handy when I was talking to women, when I was chatting up women. I had that sensitive side because it's so natural for me and it makes me a real genuine person, you know what I mean?'*

Image taken from <https://memegenerator.net/instance/32693806> [accessed 06/12/16]

## **5.4 Creative Synthesis of Adult Adoptees' Sexuality**

I sit and peer through the window of life, my life, their lives, all our lives - to capture a moment in time, a process of discovery, of engagement, of relational being – the interlocking mechanisms that connect and hold us all together in the interweaving tapestry of life. Yet to be different is the same, to be the same is to be whole. A oneness within our existences, a togetherness through our unique diversity of existence, of living.

I watch them all, all ten of them – I, the observer, the eleventh person, the eleventh hour before the dawn of our co-created map, our picture of adoptees' sexuality.

Cathy sits quietly in her hidden self, watching and praying for the enigmatic release into the realms of sexual adventure.

David has played the fantasy, the world of imagination in which he exists, but now quietens for a safer security in marriage.

Eva, the mum, the lover, the questioner, the unsure ambiguity of her sexual desire, contradicted in her innate lesbian belief toward her partner.

Anna is the playful queen of bisexuality, now dismissed through fear of being hurt by another; staying safe in her home of predictability and control.

Marty dreams of his older woman, the divine mother, his rite taken away from him by the adoption process; now housed in his sexual fantasy, unattainable and distant.

Noel is a broken man. Broken by his adoptive father's punishment, and hurt in the lasting second rejection of his birth mother's refusal to see him.

Kim dreams of being famous, again playing out a fantasy, a world of make-believe to satisfy the missing pieces of her birth family.

Vox is angry. He hates his oppressive adoptive mother's ways and feels sadness for his father's inactive role. He finds comfort and attraction in men.

Sam comforts and protects his vulnerable child, the little boy that was hurt and left alone. He finds solace in female company, playing the highly charged sexual lover, bridging the lost gap from his birth mother's relinquishment.

Pan has the path of least resistance; the conforming road to acceptance and platitude, based in socially acceptable heteronormativity.

And then there was I, the researcher. Separate, yet connected, distant, yet close. The sad little boy who lost his mum. The sad little boy that only wanted to be accepted for who he was/is. The man who is writing the words to this story of adult adoptees' sexuality.

Not only do I peer, I now pass through that window. The window of opportunity? No, the window into another world; the world of this thesis. For this thesis is my creative synthesis, and when the reader has completed the journey into and through the stories and narratives of the participants and researcher, it is up to the reader to find the completion within their own understanding and questioning. The dialogue of adult adoptees' sexuality is the study. The provocation, the interest, the banality, the curious, the fun, the serious - the range of engagement that is possible, if the reader allows their self and opens their self to the possibility.

The next step? A new vista, a new road, a new question, a myriad of possibility. Can you so glibly turn your back and walk away, back into your own world of research? So please, 'you tell me', the reader, my judge, my critic, my arbiter of justice, does it meet with approval? Because remember the adoptee is always looking for approval, is always searching for the first rejection, and is always questioning why. The sexuality of the adoptee is a sexuality of approval, is a sexuality of searching that is a sexuality of ours.

Yet the final words to leave you with, is the theme of an ‘inherent potential toward vulnerability’. It is said there exists a primal wound in all of us that have been adopted. This may be so, its undecided, but what is known is the adoptee’s sexual vulnerability.

## **5.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented the ‘individual depictions’, from the heuristic analysis, and the pictorial composite group depiction, for the ten participants. The final and finished representation of all the findings for the participants and I, including chapters 4, 5 and 6, were created and presented in the ‘creative synthesis’. In this process I explicated the distinctiveness of the research experience, *‘into its unique qualities and themes...through description...[and]...narrative’*, and, *‘the researcher has gathered what is required to construct the universal portrayal.’* (Moustakas, 1990, p.90).

In the following, chapter 6, we look at and I present the coded themes from the IPA analysis.



## Chapter 6: Stage Three – IPA- Common Themes & Shared Experiences

### 6.1 Introduction

The research question that underpins this thesis is: *How do adult adoptees make sense of, and present, their sexuality and self/identity?*

Ten participants were used in this analysis. In this chapter, the process and representation of how the research question is answered, at this stage of the thesis, will be presented through the ten participants' thematic findings, which are offered through the framework of the analytical processes using IPA analysis (see **section 3.6**). This is the third methodological 'point of entry text' (POET) for the bricolage (see **section 3.3.2**), encompassing the researcher's phenomenological and interpretive aspects of self.

*Here the analysis becomes expansive again, as the themes are explained, illustrated and nuanced. The table of themes is the basis for the account of the participants' responses...with verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support the case. Care is taken to distinguish clearly between what the respondent said and the analyst's interpretation or account of it.* (Smith & Osborne, 2007, p.76)

It is also worth noting that Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) state, '*There is no clear right or wrong way of conducting this sort of analysis*', and further encourage, '*IPA researchers to be innovative in the ways that they approach it.*' (p.80)

The main focus of this chapter is to show shared thematic findings across the individual participants' themes, using IPA. Through this process, representations of the identified connections, contradictions, patterns, and themes from the participants' responses, and how the researcher has interpretatively analysed them, are shown.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), when referring to '*looking for patterns across cases*', ask two questions, to assist the analysis, '*what connections are there across cases? Which themes*

*are the most potent?*’ (p.101). I have used these questions as a basis for the cross analysis of cases. They also state that this stage of analysis will lead to a reconfiguring and relabelling of themes. This was the case in this analysis and you will see the original themes for each participant in Appendix 3. In the table in appendix 3 the superordinate themes are the top theme in the theme table in *bold italics*; the subordinate themes are below the superordinate theme in non-italics.

Table 16 below shows the reconfiguring and relabelling of the ‘*table of themes for the group*’ (p.101), from the original table in appendix 3. I have used Smith, Flowers and Larkin’s (2009) conventional model, for clarity and distinction, as a framework of representation for the ‘table of themes’ below in this section of the thesis. For a summarised version of table 16 including the participants’ quotes see Appendix 4.

**Table 16 - Superordinate themes & Subordinate themes**

<b>Superordinate Themes</b>	<b>6.2 Sexual attitudes</b>	<b>6.3 Vulnerability</b>	<b>6.4 The 'Other'</b>	<b>6.5 The Feminine</b>
<b>Subordinate themes</b>	6.2.1 Using sex to meet a need	6.3.1 Self as vulnerable	6.4.1 The cultural 'other'	6.5.1 Mother
	6.2.2 Sexual attraction	6.3.2 Influential fear/stresses	6.4.2 Familial undercurrents	6.5.2 Searching
	6.2.3 The body	6.3.3 Hiding	6.4.3 Social pressure	6.5.3 Iconic
	6.2.4 Sexual wants	6.3.4 My pain	6.4.4 Connecting	6.5.4 Stereotypes

## **6.2 Superordinate theme - Sexual attitudes**

The first superordinate theme in Table 16 is sexual attitudes. This encompasses the participants' views and understandings of their sexuality and sexual understanding. The four subordinate themes that emerged and captured the significance of this were: 1. Using sex to meet a need, 2. Sexual attraction, 3. The body, and 4. Sexual wants.

### **6.2.1 Subordinate theme - Using sex to meet a need**

Seven of the participants discussed how they had used sex, and do use sex, within their sexual lives, other than to receive sexual gratification. Cathy, Pan, Sam, and Anna all expressed how they had used sex in their lives to gain attention, acceptance and love.

Cathy: *'I didn't have any problems with having sex with people because I was seeking acceptance and sex was one way to get it.'*

Pan: *'Getting that attention that's what was really important to me. Having and been able to draw attention and focus it on myself.'*

Sam: *'To me it's about romance and love not just about sex.'*

Anna: *'I felt like they would love me forever because I had had sex with them.'*

For Eva it was more to satisfy her lesbian sexuality and to engage within the feminine world of women.

Eva: *'I think it plays a big part in my relationships, yeah even with other people, especially with my gay friends.'*

Marty expressed his use of sex with the older woman to understand and connect to his 'inner child'.

Marty: *'Sexual relationships with an older woman, where there was something about the child in that for me.'*

David used sex in his life to satisfy a sense of self-worth and to feel worthy of women.

David: *'I never wanted people to get hurt, even though I did hurt people. I've never been malicious in that sense just cold for my own agenda.'*

### **6.2.2 Subordinate theme - Sexual attraction**

All the participants mentioned and discussed their sexuality and how this 'played out' with their attraction to the 'other'. Six of the participants explicitly stated a heterosexual attraction. Noel, Marty, and Sam all stated that women had always been their interest.

Noel: *'I have been a pretty normal sort of guy, so they say, you know heterosexual-wise.'*

Marty: *'I always had a strong sexual attraction to older women.'*

Sam: *'Some have described me as very sexual. Not sure if that's good or bad. I am heterosexual, just attraction for women.'*

Kim, Pan, and David were focused on heterosexual identities now, although they had both said they had experimented briefly with same sex relations in their teenage years and early twenties.

Kim: *'I don't think I've ever particularly struggled or wondered, other than teenage curiosity of being a lesbian and kissing a few girls.'*

Pan: *'I experimented with guys, but if I was to say how I am physically aroused. I'm more aroused my women.'*

David: *'You question in your teens, but I love women, you know. I like their company but there's always an element of sex or no sex.'*

Cathy and Anna categorised themselves as bi-sexual, experimenting with both sexes in their lives.

Cathy: *'I thought maybe for a while that I wasn't really making it work with men because I was more interested in women.'*

Anna: *'I've never actually classed myself as completely heterosexual, more bisexual, as I've had dalliances in the past with females.'*

Vox and Eva both claimed a homosexual identity and same-sex attraction. For Vox this was definite and unquestionable.

Vox: *'From high school on it was pretty clear I was attracted to guys.'*

Eva was unsure, with ambiguity in places, stating at times she was a lesbian and this was innate, and then questioning if she could be bi-sexual.

Eva: *'I'm attracted to women. But am I a lesbian, I don't know.'*

### **6.2.3 Subordinate theme – The body**

The body was discussed and presented by four of the participants, incorporating its presence in their sexuality. Cathy expressed how her body was lying dormant in relation to her sexuality.

Cathy: *'It's not kind of completely disappeared of the face of the earth but you know yeah it probably is as dormant as my sexuality.'*

David conveyed how he enjoyed the female body but needed more.

David: *'I'm attracted to somebody who's got lovely breasts and curvy body – she's female, but strip all that away, it doesn't really make that much difference. It doesn't last, that's just the physicality.'*

Marty disclosed how he listened to his body's sexual expression and language.

Marty: *'That sort of sexual drive at that age I was 18 and was perhaps my body's way of saying well this is the only way...'*

For Sam, he understood the limits to his body and how sexual performance can be impinged by it.

Sam: *'It's not just your body is it? It's everything about it. Fortunately, there are things you can take now; there weren't when I was younger.'*

#### **6.2.4 Subordinate theme – Sexual wants**

Cathy, David, Eva, Anna, Marty and Sam, all expressed their sexual wants now and at different times in their lives.

Cathy highlights her sexual want for sexual freedom of expression and excitement.

Cathy: *'I have thought about how I would love to go to one of those festivals where everyone is naked and just embracing their bodies and sexuality.'*

David understanding his sexual want, questions the morality of his actions.

David: *'Sometimes you might feel guilty just going in there for a quick shag you know. Is that wrong?'*

Eva questioning her sexuality, but understanding her sexual want to be with a woman.

Eva: *'I thought I was bisexual but I never did anything about it with a woman at that point. It wasn't until my early twenties really.'*

Anna, on reflection, recognises her sexual want as a teen and the drive for this.

Anna: *'When I was younger I kind of looked for that all the time constantly with everybody. I needed that attention.'*

Marty realises as a young man his sexual want for the older woman.

Marty: *'To be honest right from the age of 17 / 18 I felt sexually attracted to older women.'*

Sam shows us the different sides to his sexual wants and how this is linked to his sensitivity and passion.

Sam: *'My sexuality is... I'm very, it's more of a different sort of person, it's still very sensitive but it's much more passionate for women.'*

### **6.3 Superordinate theme - Vulnerability**

The second superordinate theme, in Table 16, that was created referred to the participants' vulnerability within their self and lives. The four subordinate themes integral to this are: 1. Self as vulnerable, 2. Influential fear, 3. Hiding, and 4. My pain. These subordinate themes show the different aspects of how vulnerability existed within the participants' worlds.

#### **6.3.1 Subordinate theme - Self as vulnerable**

All the participants expressed a sense of vulnerability within how they perceive themselves and their lives. Pan, Kim, Marty, and Cathy all stated an anxiousness of living and how this can relate to the perception by the 'other'.

Vox and Noel expressed low self-worth and hopelessness at times in their lives, finding it hard to develop confidence.

Vox: *'To this day I struggle with low self-esteem and sense of purpose.'*

Noel: *'I was ready to commit suicide, almost. I didn't quite get to that stage but I did hit the bottom.'*

Eva and Anna discussed vulnerability through the punishment and rejection by the 'other' and the distress and numbness this causes.

Eva: *'I just shut everything down, emotions, feelings, everything because they were not being met, but they were also getting punished too.'*

Anna: *'I'm scared, too scared to ask them and contact her because I don't want that rejection.'*

David's vulnerability expressed itself through his explicit need for love and acceptance, and how the 'other' is needed to satisfy this. This is similar also to Sam, although



Sam embraced his vulnerability and saw his 'sensitive side' as an integral part of self to cherish.

David: *'I just take it day by day and just sort of go, I want to be loved.'*

Sam: *'I've got the scars to prove it, but I still have that sensitive side to me, and I don't want to lose that it's part of who I am.'*

### **6.3.2 Subordinate theme - Influential fear/stresses**

Fear and stresses emerged with nine of the participants. All these fears and stresses were dependent on the participants' experiences of being in relations with another. Sam explicitly stated that he would fight to protect his 'vulnerable self' when threaten by the 'other'.

Sam: *'I mean I'd go the other extreme and fight to protect it, I'd literally fight, I know that's not very sensitive but I would.'*

Kim similarly would 'lose her temper' when her future plans were feeling threatened and her sense of control was feeling undermined.

Kim: *'I lose my temper with the kids when they're not doing something that I worry about – I always project into the future.'*

Pan, Cathy, Noel, Eva, David, and Anna's fear stemmed from a fear of rejection or dismissal by the 'other', if their opinions and actions didn't meet approval.

Pan: *'I attribute this to a fear; a pretty basic fear of rejection, which I think is understandable in an adoptee.'*

Cathy: *'I went through a phase of thinking my fear of having a relationship with a woman was because I would disappoint my adoptive father.'*

Noel: *'You lived in fear of 6 o'clock coming when you knew your dad would walk in the door.'*

Eva: *'Everything was shut down, and I was in a bubble really. My teenage years were quite traumatised really.'*

David: *'I wouldn't do anything to jeopardise what we've got in that sense, as much as my imagination would tempt me.'*

Anna: *'I've made a conscious effort to move away from anybody that's not a good influence or part of my life.'*

Marty's concern is based in his fear of the subject of sex, and how this creates anxiety within him.

Marty: *'When they start talking about not having sex but anything in that area. I'm kind of, oh my god, I'm getting anxious - I'm uncomfortable.'*

### **6.3.3 Subordinate theme – Hiding**

Seven of the participants spoke of their vulnerability and how they hid this from others to keep themselves safe. Cathy discussed her hidden depths of self and how aspect of herself are still out of awareness.

Cathy: *'I have really understood in the last decade how much of myself I just don't understand - how many memories I hold, how my behaviours are a form of communication and what is really going on at the subconscious level.'*

David expressed how he holds himself back in relationships, for fear of being disliked.

David: *'You don't always give your true self over, getting back to this, how can I adjust myself? How can I camouflage what somebody might not want to see, in order to be liked.'*

Noel talked of his hiding himself, so as not to be seen with fear of being hurt.

Noel: *'That's how I dealt with it, I've just pushed it away and said well what you don't see, you don't know.'*

Kim conveyed how she would hold back information and avoid people to stay safe.

Kim: *'Like, secretive in a way, you know, just not ever being able to say what I was doing or where I was going and that kind of thing because they didn't like the people I was with.'*

Marty showed how his public persona is seen by others and how different he is inside.

Marty: *'I remember once years ago a colleague said to me, I was saying I kind of fancied someone or something, and they said, 'really, I was convinced you are someone who was a-sexual. You're a 'something' but you don't have a sexuality.' And I just thought wow you know, oh god if only you knew.'*

Pan confidently and explicitly made it clear how he hides and guards from others to keep safe in relationships.

Pan: *'It's easy to guard against it by not exposing yourself.'*

Sam stated how he found it hard not to expose his vulnerability and hide, especially regarding sexual relations and feeling exposed.

Sam: *'The sexuality was, it has caused problems sometimes. I've felt very vulnerable, unable to hide sexually and I don't know if that's to do with the adoption and it's exposing me completely as a person.'*

#### **6.3.4 Subordinate theme – My pain**

All the participants either explicitly stated or alluded to a personal pain or torment that they lived with throughout their lives. For Cathy it was the fear and pain of not being 'good enough' or 'flawed'.

Cathy: *'There is also something wrapped up in there about fear of not being good enough – that there is something wrong with me. I feel I project this sense of being flawed (a reject) on to my physique and you know I feel quite vulnerable about that.'*

David's pain was based in his 'not belonging' not 'fitting'.

David: *'I'm a one-off. I don't mean that to be any sort of something special but I didn't fit.'*

Eva was still angry and her pain showed in her inability to be in relationship with her adoptive parents.

Eva: *'I can forgive them for that but as you can gather I'm not in contact with them.'*

Noel's pain and anguish is embedded in his birth mother's second rejection, when he tried to find her and have a reunion.

Noel: *'Birth mother was totally against it and she almost, from what I understand, she almost held my aunt to ransom to say if you have anything more to do with him, I will cut you out, so unfortunately that was how the double jeopardy came in then.'*

Kim discussed her need to have things 'right' and the torment and pain of having to accept life isn't perfect.

Kim: *'I suppose it's accepting that life isn't necessarily like that. It isn't perfect.'*

Anna's pain is still with the birth mother she can't contact and the fear of a possible second rejection.

Anna: *'Constantly looking for that love and attention because it feels like it was taken away from you from an early age as babies.'*

Marty is still angry with his birth mum, and feels the pain and guilt of these feelings.

Marty: *'The anger I had lots of people say that you're really angry with your mum. And I'm like no I'm not. But really I kind of got to see that I am.'*

Pan expressed a 'deep pain' from being adopted and all that has come from this experience.

Pan: *'A deep well of pain that has, you know, anger is its language of expression for want of a better channel.'*

Vox is still longing for a resolve and peace regarding his adoption and his need to connect and know his 'true self'.

Vox: *'I grew up disconnected from my true self.'*

Sam's pain is reminiscent of his dad's anger and pain that was directed at him, and his memories of it.

Sam: *'My dad was one-person coz we grew up in an apartment and there was one person very much to the public, and he could be slightly different, I took the brunt of it really.'*

## **6.4 Superordinate theme - The 'Other'**

Given the relational world in which the participants live (and arguably all of us), the 'Other', as a superordinate theme (see **Table 16**), plays a significant role in the participants' understanding and presenting of their sexual self and identity. Four main subordinate themes emerged through this part of the analysis: 1. The Cultural Other, 2. Familial undercurrents, 3. Social pressure, and 4. Connecting.

### **6.4.1 Subordinate theme - The Cultural 'Other'**

The cultural 'Other' shows the significant part that the participants' cultural societies, and contexts, play within their understanding of self. All the participants expressed some form of cultural influence in their lives. David talked about his travelling and cultural experiences, and how these had had a positive experience within his growth as a person.

Noel was less embracing and expressed his intolerance of religious values and beliefs being forced on him.

Noel: *'The local Quakers want to come and knock on my door and chat to me, up to them, but don't push it in my face or I'll shut the door on you.'*

Cathy also expressed this but through negative media portrayals of women's images and cultural expectations.

Cathy: *'All the cultural aspects of what is involved with being a woman - all that is rammed down our throats through the magazines and TV.'*

Sam expressed this within the stigma of being an adoptee, especially in the 1970s, and being seen as socially unworthy and classed as *'second hand goods'*.

Sam: *'Being illegitimate that meant you were seen as second class, almost like second hand goods, from a second-hand store.'*

Vox was also angry at the adoption process, and how he was passed through the system and their rules, without any thought for him.

Vox: *'For me the adoption process was built on lies, half-truths and secrets and asks the adoptee to accept unanswered questions.'*

Marty's cultural influence was embedded within his sexual attraction to older women, and how he had felt judged and uncomfortable being seen publicly with an older woman as his partner.

Marty: *'Mrs Robinson type...we had a relationship for a while...I think there were times when out in public that I would be uncomfortable.'*

Pan sees his sexuality being shaped by his early exposure to male to female pornography and the accessibility of this, compared to same-sex pornography.

Pan: *'When I was teenager no one ever passed around pictures of naked men. I'd go to the butchers on my way to school every morning to get a pie for my lunch and once a week he'd give us a cd full of porn. So, a lot of that was cultural exposure.'*

For Kim, as a mum, she felt shaped by her peers and conforming to the accepted cultural styles of this image.

Kim: *'You weren't allowed to have any piercings, so you kind of go into that, don't you? And you become this – I guess you are influenced by people around you.'*

Eva expressed this through her need to make a stand in relation to her lesbian sexuality and being seen in the public eye.

Eva: *'When I'm out and I'm talking to people I don't say my partner I say my girlfriend.'*

For Anna, she preferred to distance herself from others and society's suppression and influence within the safety of her own home.

Anna: *'I feel very suppressed... and kind of happier at home...so I don't want to be around other people where I can't be me.'*

#### **6.4.2 Subordinate theme - Familial undercurrents**

The family and family relations all played a significant role in the lives and experiences of the participants.

Cathy felt pressure from her adoptive family to conform, although she found it hard to understand herself and behaviour as she was growing up. This was mirrored by Marty, and the pressures from his adoptive parents to be *'a good boy'* and conform to their wishes.

Cathy: *'My parents would say things like we don't understand your behavior and I would go away and think well I don't either.'*

Marty: *'I think there was an incredible pressure to be a good boy. I wasn't always a good boy. I was mysterious I was a bad kid. They're didn't like the mystery very much... pressure even now, there is an incredible pressure to be a good boy.'*

This was also expressed by Pan in relation to his sexuality and with *'a lot of pressure...to be straight'*, or heterosexual from his adoptive family.

Pan: *'A lot of my family are Irish as well, there's a lot of pressure there to be whoever I am but also be straight.'*

Vox felt controlled and smothered by his adoptive mother, with little interaction or support from his adoptive father as a proactive role model, which caused him anger and pain.

Vox: *'I would say I had a very micromanaging controlling adoptive mother, very insecure and my dad was very passive.'*

For Noel, he made a conscious effort to not repeat his adoptive father's abusive behaviour with his own children, and the feeling of not having any other reference point, other than his own parents, for parenting when his first child was born.

Noel: *'You didn't love your kids the way I'd been brought up, because there's nobody at school that teaches you how to bring kids up.'*

David expressed his need for a '*normal family*' and how the adoptive family, in his eyes, didn't provide this for him.

David: *'I think there's something that you hanker for which to a degree is normality or a normal relationship with your mother or your father.'*

Eva expressed a '*gap*' in her life when her eldest daughter went to University, and how her marriage breakdown, sense of self and lesbian sexuality was becoming more prominent, due to her role as a mother changing.

Eva: *'When my eldest was grown and went off to Uni, the marriage had sort of been on and off, so at that point there was a big gap in my life.'*

Kim discussed how her need to protect her adoptive parent's feelings, was stopping her searching for her biological parents.

Kim: *'They are my Mum and Dad and part of me would feel bad looking into my biological parents because I'd feel bad for them.'*

Anna was questioning her '*wild behaviour*' growing up and wanted to understand if this was a reaction to her adoptive parents and adoption, or an innate quality of her birth parents.

Anna: *'I was the black sheep of the family, always the wild child, so is that because I was adopted or because that I'm like my birth parents.'*

Sam felt lucky by his female dominated environment, family, and extended family, as he saw this as a means to get closer to and to understand women.



Sam: *'I'm drawn more to a female environment, I've got two daughters, 4 nieces, loads of female cousins, so I've always felt more comfortable, and I feel like myself when I'm talking to women.'*

### **6.4.3 Subordinate theme – Social pressure**

Cathy, Eva, Kim, Marty and Pan all expressed elements of social pressure in their lives and how this has affected them and still affects them. Cathy mentioned the media's influence and the social pressure this exhibits on women.

Cathy: *'Our self-worth and self-esteem are very wrapped up with society's ideals as conveyed through the media and if you do not conform you are more likely to get rejected.'*

Eva stated how her upbringing and culture had influenced her in not being able to express her gay identity and sexuality.

Eva: *'I think my upbringing had a lot to do with that I was never allowed to be myself.'*

Kim is fearful of having to sacrifice elements of herself to conform to what society's ideals are of being a woman.

Kim: *'Sometimes I do sort of look at the past and go, Oh, I don't want to conform that much!'*

Marty shared his need to be understood as an adoptee and the social pressure to conform from others, and to 'not make fuss'.

Marty: *'It is very hard for people to really understand and it's not for want of trying. Friends and family and others in that they do not really understand and know what that feels like as an adoptee.'*

Pan feels the social pressure of having to conform to the ideal of a 'man' and what that means to a woman.

Pan: *'It's the part I present to them because it's how I feel right. It's how I understand how to make a woman comfortable.'*

### **6.4.4 Subordinate theme – Connecting**

Eight of the participants discussed how they connected to others and the importance of ‘connecting’ in their lives as an adoptee. For Cathy this was based in her connecting to her birth family.

Cathy: *‘It was overwhelming for me to realise how important these people were to me and how being separated from them had been so incredibly painful and how alone I had felt.’*

David and Anna felt more fortunate and grateful to have close trusting friends to connect with – their surrogate family.

David: *‘I class myself as being very lucky to have a handful of friends – maybe four, three or four, three perhaps that I would go to if there was anything major, yes, so quite lucky in that respect.’*

Anna: *‘The friends that I have, I kind of have real special bonds with them. I’ve formed a family with friends.’*

Eva showed how her need to have a family of her own, to connect to her own children, was important to her life.

Eva: *‘The desire to have something of my own and my own family overrode everything.’*

Kim also expressed the importance of biological ties and the possible meanings of these.

Kim: *‘I always felt that my friends had very open discussions with their mums – I mean I am very open with my daughter and with my son as well. Now I just wonder whether if you actually give birth to someone, you are, you want to impart all of this.’*

Noel conveyed the importance of connecting to his birth mother through similar facial features.

Noel: *‘I thought, no I don’t really look like her but then there are certain little things, like I’ve got this little fat bit on the end of my nose – she’s got it.’*

Vox champions the need for ‘open adoption’ and the importance of the connections to our birth families.

Vox: *‘I am an advocate for open adoptions and the right to know and have access to our birth families.’*

For Sam, connecting to similarities of his birth grandfather, and how they both worked for the police.

Sam: *‘There was a lot of religious bigotry in the police, so he obviously had a lot about him and that’s quite a nice thing to find that link to him, I like that.’*

## **6.5 Superordinate theme - The Feminine**

The feminine concept, superordinate theme (see **Table 16**), and presentation of this was mentioned and discussed by all the participants in their interviews. Given the nature of adoption and the relinquishment of the adoptee by the birth mother, it is not surprising that this superordinate theme emerged. The four subordinate themes that were created from this are: 1. Mother, 2. Searching, 3. Iconic, and 4. Stereotypes.

### **6.5.1 Subordinate theme - Mother**

The ‘Mother’ as a subordinate theme was apparent either with the relationship with the adoptee’s adoptive mother and/or birth mother, and how this had influenced their understanding of self/identity.

Participants Cathy, David, Pan and Marty had met their birth mother’s and formed a relationship of some kind with her. Eva, Anna, Vox, and Kim had no contact so far with their birth mother. Noel and Sam’s birth mothers were now deceased.

Cathy had had a good relationship with her birth mum and found recognition and acceptance in her mother's searching for her.

Cathy: *'My mum had been searching for me since I was 11 and had been waiting since I was 18 for me to turn up.'*

David had an on-off relationship with his birth mother, and only realised and acknowledged that his gran, who'd brought him up, after her death, had really been his mum.

David: *'I never called her Mum until five or six years ago when she was. I mean, she died and sort of like, she'd always been my mum really.'*

Pan, also had an on-off relationship with his birth mum, and found it hard to initially connect emotionally with her.

Pan: *'We spoke for two/three hours and when she left she had a wee cry and I kind of felt like something weird. It really took me a few weeks to start connecting on an emotional level.'*

Marty found it difficult to see any other woman in his life coming close to his idolatry of his birth mum, even though she'd now stopped contact with him.

Marty: *'I'm unconsciously still putting my birthmother up on a bit of a pedestal and that no one else can match that standard.'*

Eva yearned for a mother, an adoptive mother that could have loved her for her, and a birth mother that she could find.

Eva: *'I suppose I will always yearn for a mother to be there for me. But I know that's not going to happen and it's not going to happen with her.'*

Kim only briefly mentioned her birth mother, but held onto the information her adoptive mother had given her about her.

Kim: *'She was a single mother, and I know she was very young from Liverpool.'*

Anna found solace in her birth name and the connection it gave her to her birth mother.

Anna: *'That's how I feel about my birth name. I think maybe on some level it gives me a connection back to my birth mum.'*

Noel was angry with his birth mother and her *'double rejection'* when he had gone searching for her.

Noel: *'It was a double rejection from your mother, not only did she have the first one where she had no choice which you could accept, but then when she has got a choice, she still rejects.'*

Sam showed sadness that he will never meet his birth mother, but finds a connection and comfort through his relationship with his birth sister.

Sam: *'My birth mother, she's dead now but I'm very close to my birth sister who wasn't adopted.'*

### **6.5.2 Subordinate theme - Searching**

Searching for the feminine and/or mother were expressed by seven of the participants. David's need to keep searching was expressed through his numerous sexual encounters with different women throughout his life.

Eva after leaving her husband also went searching through her dating of different women.

Eva: *'Lots of people were shocked when I left my husband and I said I was dating women.'*

Kim is curious about searching for her birth mother, and stresses that she will *'look into it'* at some time in the future.

Kim: *'I will look into it, go onto the Internet and I know you have to do this and then apparently you have to have counselling – Oh God.'*

Anna is the same, but also wants to make those innate connections to see if she is like her birth parents in any way.

Anna: *'I would love to see my birth parents just to see if I am like them, and to see if my mannerisms are from my birth parents.'*

Marty as a child would dream about a mysterious woman, who he attributes to an image of his birth mother, and the *'allure or some kind of pull towards'* her.

Marty: *'Dreams as a young child about a woman, and not knowing who that was, it wasn't anyone I knew in my daily life, you know who was present in the dreams in having an allure or some kind of pull towards me.'*

Vox expressed anger that, for him, he can never know his adoptive parents due to adoptive laws, even though they have now changed; he still feels incapacitated by this.

Vox: *'My adoption was a closed adoption I did not know and could not know who my birthparents were due to the laws.'*

Sam again through being adopted, and how this has influenced his numerous relationships with women, has caused a *'searching for something much deeper'* within him.

Sam: *'I still think because I was adopted I wanted to search; I was trying to search for something much deeper.'*

### **6.5.3 Subordinate theme – Iconic**

An iconic image of the female/feminine was present for four of the participants. David talked the iconic image through an aesthetics appreciation.

David: *'It might just be aesthetic yes, I mean you can appreciate, you know a person that you are talking to, through whatever aspects, you know and an admiration.'*

Kim questioned the feminine icon in the role of being the eternal mother giving birth.

Kim: *'I'm not 100% sure but you don't forget having a baby, do you?'*

Anna, also from the icon of mother, expressing the feminine quality of nurturing the child.

Anna: *'I believe when you become a mother, your love is directed toward the child.'*

For Marty, the icon of the feminine was wrapped up in the image of the older woman and the mother.

Marty: *'The older woman, if the older woman, is an icon like the mother.'*

#### **6.5.4 Subordinate theme – Stereotype**

The feminine stereotype was mentioned and discussed by five of the participants. Cathy expressed her annoyance and frustration of how women are portrayed within western culture.

Cathy: *'What it means to be a woman, what our roles are and what is sexy. The objectification is an added dimension to that challenge.'*

David and Marty gave a somewhat stereotypical male perspective on the stereotype of women.

David: *'Emotional closeness, I've been there, but I think that's where maybe the female nurture or the female psyche is different.'*

Marty: *'Feminine is in my world-view of my experience, this beautiful nurturing all-encompassing energy.'*

Eva conveyed the female role of the mother and the social image of being a 'good mum'.

Eva: *'I was very mumsy...that was my main goal. I wanted to be a good mum.'*

Anna highlighted the stereotypes of the female being judgemental and critical of each other.

Anna: *‘The males that I’m friendly with are very honest; they won’t kind of beat-around-the-bush. They don’t judge me. Whereas I do have female friends, and erm, you know?’*

## **6.6 Summary**

In this chapter I have shown and presented the idiographic and shared thematic findings for the ten participants. This incorporated the use and illustrative model of IPA, which revealed four superordinate themes: 1. Sexual attitudes, 2. Vulnerability, 3. The ‘Other’, and 4. The Feminine.

In the following, chapter 7, I will discuss the literature and research findings, integrating them into the thesis discussion.



## Chapter 7: Discussion – sexuality and adoption

### 7.1 Introduction

The research question that underpins this thesis is: *How do adult adoptees make sense of, and present, their sexuality and self/identity?* The aims of this research:

- ❖ To gain access to, and gather, adult adoptee's personal narratives/stories around the subject of their sexuality, their self-identity and their adoption;
- ❖ To give 'voice' to adult adoptees around the subject of sexuality and adoption;
- ❖ To represent and then present these narratives/stories honouring both the individual particulars of 'lived experience' and also to highlight any shared thematic themes of the participants.

Chapter 7 will integrate and critique the literature and data findings, in an attempt to answer the research question and meet the aims of the study. This chapter will explore the adult adoptees' (participants') sexuality, self-identity, and their adoption, incorporating aspects of biological, psychological and sociological theories and thinking. The nature vs nurture debate will be revisited, in relation to the findings, with a focus on the socio-political implications for the adult adoptee, and how this affects practice: politically, therapeutically and theoretically.

### 7.2 Genetic Sexual Attraction

The contextualisation of the research (see **section 1.1**) is within adult adoptees' understanding and 'sense making' of their sexuality and self-identity, and how this has /or has not been influenced by their adoption. As previously stated (see **chapter 2**) within the adoption literature sexuality as a subject, is sparsely researched with only two studies, (Greenberg, 1993; Greenberg & Littlewood, 1995) giving a focus to adoptees' sexuality based on the subject of 'genetic sexual attraction'. As previously stated in the literature review, the

current adoption literature gives only a few paragraphs to the subject, referring either to adolescent sexual development and/or pathologizing the adoptee's sexuality with reference to the 'incest taboo' (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Javier et al., 2007; Lifton, 1979, 2009; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009), or 'Genetic Sexual Attraction (GSA)' (Eleftheriou-Smith, 2014; Gonyo, 1987; Greenberg, 1993; Greenberg & Littlewood, 1995; GSA, 2012; Kirsta, 2003; Liebhauser, 2015; Lithglow, 2014).

Gonyo (1987) defines GSA as, '*[I]ntense erotic feelings felt by birth relatives following reunion*'. (p.1)

Given the subject of 'incest/GSA' and the subject's predominance in the existing literature and research, only three of the participants (including me) made any mention to this phenomenon. Of the participants that did, it was mentioned only fleetingly and, they did not linger on this point. Possible factors for this could be due to the private and public, non-acceptance and stigma that surrounds this subject (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Javier et al., 2007; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009). From outside the adoption literature, Crossley (2000) highlights how the medicalisation of incest has dismissed the criminality, stating:

*[M]aking incest a topic of public discourse has resulted in the 'medicalization' of incest and the creation of an 'incest industry'. The effect of medicalization has been to reduce incest from a 'crime' to a 'disease'; a psychological illness which involves the entire family...by looking at incest as a 'family' problem, the 'status quo could be preserved' and the problem explained in such a way that it lay in the dysfunctional nature of a particular family rather than the abusive behaviour of [the abuser]. (p.130)*

It would seem for Crossley (relating to non-consenting adults) that the medicalisation of incest releases the responsibility of the incest/abuse from the abuser. What is interesting in this statement, and raises questions relating to the adult adoptee and birth family member involved: When does it become abuse? Who is more vulnerable, the adoptee, or birth parent?

Is it abuse in consenting siblings, for example the adoptee and birth sibling? Lithglow (2014) offers a fairly neutral stance on the phenomenon of GSA, although she pleads to our sense of empathy and understanding on how GSA can be for those involved. Liebhauser (2015) gives a vivid and open account of her five-book series; where she documents her adoption reunion, and how GSA became apparent, and a driving force in her relationship with her birth sibling sister. This account not only shocks aspects of familial living, but claims and presents the vulnerability, and lack of social support and understanding that can accompany this phenomenon. For Verrier (2009), the matter is very clear, *'No matter how much the adoptee pleads with the mother/father...sexual relations between parent-figures and children, regardless of age, should never happen'* (p. 140).

Regarding the legalisation on incest in England and Wales, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, affirming Crossley (2000), legally states that sex with an adult who is related as parent (including adoptive parent), grandparent, child (including adopted child), grandchild, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, uncle, aunt, nephew or niece, is illegal.

Given the above legality of incest/GSA in this country, it does not seem strange, that there was a caution and measured care experienced by me, from the participants, when interviewing the participants that mentioned this subject. I also practiced this restraint when the subject was raised. Participant Marty mentioned these feelings toward his birth mother. Marty shared, *'I felt and to some degree a physical attraction and arousal you know which was very frightening, shocking, very shaming and I can feel myself going red now.'*

Cathy experienced GSA toward her biological sister, *'a period of being attracted to one of my sisters. I just loved her so much; we had such a beautiful strong connection that it felt natural that it includes sex. I never mentioned it to her or anyone, but I did write about it at the time - it was as if I had taken all the ingredients of a fairy tale romance and projected them onto her.'*

Participants Marty and Cathy mention these intense feelings of GSA, but both stated that they had not acted on them, or even discussed them with the birth parent or sibling to

which they were attributed to. Both had felt a strong sense of confusion, fear and shame, with no appropriate place or support to share and work through these feelings at the time.

Although only stated and confirmed by two of the participants in this study, this would still suggest and confirm that GSA is possible and is experienced by adult adoptees. Therefore, current clinical practice and support networks should be open to this possibility, and although given the social stigma attached with this (especially through media - Gill, 2016; Myall, 2016; Reagan, 2015), practitioners and professionals need to take seriously the fear, stress and confusion that this can have for an adoptee, and the birth relative.

### 7.3 Assessing the value from the data

Chapter 4 presented my lived experience of sexuality as an adoptee through an auto-ethnographic account. Chapter 5 presented the individual depictions for each participant, creating a representation and themes around their understanding of adoptee sexuality, and the final creative synthesis of the heuristic process. Chapter 6 presented four superordinate themes, created from the IPA data, each superordinate theme had four corresponding subordinate themes (see **Table 17 below**). The following sections will discuss the value of the data findings in accordance to the existing literature.

**Table 17 Superordinate themes and subordinate themes repeated**

Superordinate Themes	Sexual attitudes	Vulnerability	The 'Other'	The Feminine
Subordinate themes	Using sex to meet a need	Self as vulnerable	The cultural 'other'	Mother

	Sexual attraction	Influential fear/stresses	Familial undercurrents	Searching
	The body	Hiding	Social pressure	Iconic
	Sexual wants	My pain	Connecting	Stereotypes

#### 7.4 Sexual Attitudes

Jackson (2007) argues that gender and sexuality are complex interconnecting categories. They intersect on many varied levels, *‘of the social (institutional, the cultural/ideological, the interactional and subjective) do not necessarily map directly onto each other’* (p.6), and they are fluid and changeable through time. She further claims that, *‘The concept of “sexuality” thus refers to a rather amorphous and shifting field since what makes an act, a desire, or a relationship sexual are the meanings invested in it.’* (p.6) This would suggest that personal attitudes and shared attitudes constitute the sexual meaning we give to our sexual understandings and behavior in our lives. In the case of all the participants this would seem possible. Kim, Pan, and David were focused on heterosexual behaviour now, although they had both said they had experimented briefly with same sex relations in their teenage years and early twenties. Cathy and Anna understand their sexual behaviours as bi-sexual, experimenting with both sexes in their lives. For me, my sexuality is a fluid process and dependent on the person I engage with and find attraction to.

However, Jackson, like Simon (1996), is referring to the concept of sexuality in a postmodern age, where pluralization, individuality and multiplicity of choice are prevalent within our social worlds. If we are to adopt this postmodern concept then sexuality, and people's attitudes to sexuality, become decentered, destabilized, no longer essential or innately formed. Everything is 'up for grabs' an 'anything goes' of sexuality, played out through people's personal desires, and fragmented dependent on relationship, partner, and context, which for participants Noel, Marty and Kim has never really been the case.

Plummer (2007), although sympathetic to postmodernism and queer theory, cites Seidman (1994), '*Modernity is not abruptly coming to an end. In most parts of the globe, modernization remains the chief social goal...it may be in crisis but it continues to shape the contours of our lives.*' (p.20). Plummer (2007) goes on to argue that he is open and understands the academic shaping and changing of post-modernistic thought toward sexuality; however, he sees and experiences this change in a slow, and routinized process in the *everyday* of society. He states:

*[W]ith the exception of some radical sexual transgressors, changes do not happen that easily or quickly – and the unstable identity-less, utterly fractured sexual and gender identity seems to be largely a myth created by social science!* (p.24)

On the whole I mainly agree with Plummer's statement and viewpoint, which to a greater degree was substantiated by the participants in this study.

From my experience, and the participants' general views, regarding their sexualities, the self-understanding and self/identity of their sexuality was grounded in routinized and already existing socially/culturally formed attitudes and beliefs. Noel, Marty, and Sam all stated that women had always been their interest, exhibiting a 'normal' heterosexuality.

Noel: '*I have been a pretty normal sort of guy, so they say, you know heterosexual-wise.*'

Marty: '*I always had a strong sexual attraction to older women.*'

Sam: *'Some have described me as very sexual. Not sure if that's good or bad. I am heterosexual, just attraction for women.'*

As previously stated above Cathy and Anna both categorised themselves as bi-sexual, experimenting with both sexes in their lives, accepting the westernised cultural category of bi-sexual.

Eva and Vox both accepted a gay identity and the sexuality that is attributed to that. Vox: *'From high school on it was pretty clear I was attracted to guys.'* Eva was unsure about lesbian as an identity, although her questioning was still within the cultural sexual categories available to her. Eva: *'I'm attracted to women. But am I a lesbian, I don't know. Could I go back to being straight I'm not sure.'*

The only radical to these socially acceptable attitudes, (for example heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual divisions, and the associated desires, behaviors and acts that accompany them), was me. A possible answer to this and one that aligns with Plummer's (2007) previous statement is that I am in-fact a part of the social sciences, and working from a postgraduate academically formed perspective. The other participants were not. The only other participant that did 'slightly touch' on this way of thinking, was participant Pan, who'd experienced and explored same-sex relationships, and questioned aspects of his gender identity and sexual orientation. Pan: *'I think in recent years I've tried to actively become more androgynous, and less overtly masculine.'*

Given these aspects of the postmodern and modernist argument, what this seems to suggest and confirm, is that as individuals we take, integrate and incorporate, culturally existing attitudes and beliefs, again pertaining to Rogers (1959) concept of introjected values.

If we look at the subordinate themes 'sexual attraction' (see **section 6.2.2**) and 'sexual wants' (see **section 6.2.4**), the participants' sexuality points to the culturally formed and available language and values of that cultures sexual 'scripts' or concepts.

Cathy, David, Eva, Anna, Marty and Sam, all expressed their sexual wants now and at different times in their lives. The participants' experiences (See **chapter 5**) show the interaction of a person's experiential experiences whereby we can to some degree personally 'make sense' of these; yet our cultural languages and practices give us the means to do this, on the whole.

Gagnon and Simon's (1974, 2002) concept of sexual scripts confirms this 'sense making' from the culturally available language and social constructs that exist in a society. Therefore, the individual, as reflexive agent, can create and form their own personal attitudes and beliefs, regarding their sexuality, sexual identity, and all that it encompasses. The very nature of this study, and the qualitative methods used (see **chapters 3, 4, 5, 6**), supported and fostered an opportunity for the participants to do this very thing.

What this espouses, in accord with the value from the data, is a possible *choice* in how we as individuals wish to understand ourselves, and the non-fixed possibility of identity and self-formation. It also highlights, yet again, the cultural limitations and categories that a culture has available to its individuals, and also the cultural oppression and discrimination that can be subjected to some of its citizens. This was apparent with participants Eva, Vox, Cathy, Anna, Pan, and me that had experienced discrimination through not 'fitting in' to the heterosexual majority, of western culture. Feltham (2010) draws our attention to this within the psychotherapy profession:

*[T]hat counselling and psychotherapy represent a critique of society, or particularly of those social trends and institutions that are dehumanizing. Therapy and its linked concerns for emotional intelligence and good social relations highlight the damage done to children, the vulnerable, and indeed to all of us, by thoughtless brutal traditions. (p.8)*

If we move onto the next superordinate theme the 'Other', we can see how this influences the lives of an adoptee and the possible outcomes for the adoptee.



## 7.5 The ‘Other’

Rogers (1951, 1959) claimed that the organism has one basic tendency to actualise itself, fulfilling its potentials within the relational contexts and influences of its social world, constituting a separatism or individualism.

Angyal (1941) would state that the organism has not one, but two tendencies: one tendency to fulfil its *autonomy*, and the other to integrate towards *homonomy*. He defines autonomy as a ‘*self-governing entity*’ (p.23), and homonomy as ‘*to be in harmony with superindividual units, the social group, nature, God, ethical world order, or whatever the person’s formulation of it may be.*’ (p.172) Tudor and Worrall (2006) interpret this as, ‘*Human beings live autonomously and homonomously in a world that is heteronomous or other.*’ (p.51) Therefore paradoxically independence/interdependence constitutes a reality/world that is *other* to us.

This became apparent and is apparent from the subordinate themes: ‘The cultural other’ (See **section 6.4.1**), ‘Familial undercurrents’ (See **section 6.4.2**), ‘Social pressure’ (See **section 6.4.3**), and ‘Connecting’ (See **section 6.4.4**) that were created from the participants’ data.

### 7.5.1 The Cultural ‘Other’

The cultural ‘other’ demonstrates and draws out attention toward the cultural aspect of the ‘other’ within the adoptee’s world. Spencer-Oatey (2012) signifies the shared processes and conventions that a group’s cultural understanding and ‘ways of going along’ constitute. Although she does to some degree also emphasise the individual’s capacity to make a choice regarding these conventions.

Ferraro (1998) draws our attention to the non-isolation and dependence on at least two people to create a culture. Again, we see the shared and agreed ‘ways’ of understanding each other and relating. This is also supported by Garfinkel’s (1967) ‘Indexicality’, in that

human 'ways of going along', the communications, etc. are contextually bound and dependent on the social relations that have created them. Similar to Bakhtin's (1984) concept of 'heteroglossia' where meanings are created and are particular to the people, place and time they are used.

Relating this to the participants' data we see the cultural 'other' present in their lives:

For Kim, as a mum, she felt shaped by her peers and conforming to the accepted cultural styles of this image: *'You weren't allowed to have any piercings, so you kind of go into that, don't you? And you become this – I guess you are influenced by people around you.'*

Pan sees his sexuality being shaped by his early exposure to male to female pornography and the accessibility of this, compared to same-sex pornography: *'When I was teenager no one ever passed around pictures of naked men. I'd go to the butchers on my way to school every morning to get a pie for my lunch and once a week he'd give us a cd full of porn. So a lot of that was cultural exposure.'*

For Anna, she preferred to distance herself from others and society's suppression and influence within the safety of her own home: *'I feel very suppressed... and kind of happier at home...so I don't want to be around other people where I can't be me.'*

David talked about his travelling and cultural experiences, and how these had had a positive experience within his growth as a person.

What was evident from the participants' data (see **Chapter 4, 5, 6**), is the degree, or perception of the cultural influence, in either a negative or positive way. The cultural influence had either enhanced their wellbeing or diminished their wellbeing. Interestingly only two participants Eva and David, shared a positive cultural influence from the 'other' from an adult adoptee perspective; Eva through her lesbian culture, and David from his travels to different countries and cultures. The remaining participants shared how they had been negatively influenced by 'the cultural other' and by the forms of oppression and discrimination from within the social systems they lived.

The subordinate theme ‘social pressure’ (see **section 6.4.3**) gives voice to the participants regarding this concern:

Cathy mentioned the media’s influence and the social pressure this exhibits on women: *‘Our self-worth and self-esteem are very wrapped up with society’s ideals as conveyed through the media and if you do not conform you are more likely to get rejected.’*

Eva, although stating a positive influence through her lesbian culture, also stated how her upbringing and culture had influenced her in not being able to express her gay identity and sexuality.

Kim is fearful of having to sacrifice elements of herself to conform to what society’s ideals are of being a woman.

Marty shared his need to be understood as an adoptee and the social pressure to conform from others, and to ‘not make a fuss’.

### **7.5.2 Cultural discrimination**

From a sexuality and gender perspective, Rahman and Jackson (2010) highlight the inherent discrimination and dominance of cultural heterosexuality as the given norm:

*Sexuality as a sphere of life is not itself a structural phenomenon, but it is structured through social regulation, notably through the institutionalization of heterosexuality, which gives rise to hierarchies of normative and non-normative sexualities. (p.52)*

This suggests that any form of sexuality or gender outside of heterosexuality, is deemed inappropriate and ‘not normal’, which I draw attention to at the end of section 7.4. Rahman & Jackson (2010), further claim that, *‘[E]veryday culture encodes meanings...that not only reflect society but also construct it and affect how we can take action.’* (p.135) If this is the case then any form of behaviour or action outside the accepted ‘everyday/social norms’ would be classed as deviant. If a person found themselves feeling or behaving outside the ‘social group’s norms’, a possible process of self/other discrimination could take place. Rogers’ (1959)

concept of conditions of worth, Garfinkel's (1967) 'morality', and Gergen's (2011) 'moral order', demonstrate this reasoning.

The adoption literature, also presents existing and inherent forms of discrimination of the adoptee, presenting as 'not normal', 'other', and/or 'pathologised' (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; DfE, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Eldridge, 1999; Farr, Grant-Marsney & Grotevant, 2014; Feeney, Passmore & Peterson, 2007; Harris, 2012, Javier et al., 2007; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Lifton, 1979, 2007, 2009, 2010; Osborne, Mahmood & Visser, 2015; Miles, 2003; Moran, 1994; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Timmor & Katz-Navon, 2008; Verrier, 2009; Watkins, 2005).

Most notable is Harris' (2012) book titled 'Chosen', and Lifton's (2009) reference to the adoptee as 'special' or 'chosen'. The adoptee narratives and poems in Harris (2012), tell of their experiences of discrimination around the concept of being told they are 'special', and 'chosen' by the adoptive parents. The participants in this study also experienced this process of being 'exalted as special and chosen', and then having to deal with the recurrent anxiety, stress and fear that accompanied the expectations and conditions from the adoptive parents, to live up to this unattainable ideal.

Verrier (2009) highlights pathology of the adoptee through loss, grief and trauma (PTSD), supported by Brodzinsky and Schechter (1990), and Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig (1992).

Watkins (2005) challenging a modernist paradigm also infers an intrinsic 'pathologizing' disenfranchising and discriminating the adoptee. She draws on examples of her 'own and her family's' transracial adoption, to demonstrate the discrimination and marginalisation. This is also present in Harris (2012), where the adoptees retell their discriminatory experiences. Watkins' (2005) ominous fear of 'pathologizing' is now alarmingly, more than present, in the current DfE (2014) report, with a disturbingly high percentage of adoptees, being given psychiatric diagnoses.

Given the current UK statistics (DfE, 2014) and the above-mentioned adoptee literature; it would appear that the marginalisation and ‘othering’ of the adoptee is evident. The consequences of this are also present and significant, with adoptees experiencing the anxiety, stress and fear, that accompanies the feelings of discrimination of ‘not fitting in’ or feeling ‘not normal’ within their given cultures. This was evident with the participants’ experiences. They also stressed how these cultural expectations had left them feeling uncomfortable, stressed, and anxious, which relates and is attributed to the adoptees’ ‘vulnerable-self’ (see **section 6.3.1**). This leads us onto the superordinate theme ‘vulnerability’ and how this again influences the self-formation and sexuality of the adoptee.

## **7.6 Vulnerability**

Given the subject of adoption *intrinsically* and the relinquishment of the birth child by the birth mother/family (Barth et al., 2005; Brodzinsky, 2011; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; DfE, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Farr, Grant-Marsney & Grotevant, 2014; Harris, 2012, Javier et al., 2007; Lifton, 1979, 2007, 2009, 2010; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009), it is not surprising that the superordinate theme ‘Vulnerability’, was dominate in the data.

All the current literature on adoption (see **sections 2.3 & 2.5**) refers to the adoptee, and presents the adoptee, as a vulnerable individual with accompanying problems.

Schofield and Beek (2006) claim behavioural issues and psychological issues are more than apparent with adoptees, e.g. loss, anger, controlling, and low self-worth. These features were, or have been, present in the participants in sometime in their lives.

Vox and Noel expressed low self-worth and hopelessness at times in their lives, finding it hard to develop confidence. Eva and Anna discussed vulnerability through the punishment and rejection by the ‘other’ and the distress and numbness this causes. David’s vulnerability expressed itself through his explicit need for love and acceptance, and how the

‘other’ is needed to satisfy this. This is similar also to Sam, although Sam embraced his vulnerability and saw his ‘sensitive side’ as an integral part of self to cherish.

Verrier (2009) also claims the adoptee has a ‘primal wound’, an unnatural postnatal separation from the birth mother which is ‘*indelibly imprinted upon the unconscious minds*’ (p.1) of the adoptee. Out of the eleven participants, only participants Vox, Cathy, Eva and myself mentioned and/or connected with Verrier’s (2009) concept of the ‘primal wound’, having read the book or had some knowledge of it, and felt some significance and understanding from it. Verrier’s (2009) concept of the ‘primal wound’ supposes a fundamental vulnerability within the adoptee, which I further explore in section 7.6.3 around the vulnerable nature of an adoptee.

Regarding vulnerability in general, the adoptees’ narratives and poems in Harris (2012), all speak about feelings of fear, confusion, loss, isolation and anxiety, which have led to vulnerability in the adoptees, and again were present in the participants’ experiences. The DfE (2013a, 2013b, 2014) state clearly the vulnerable state of ‘being’ the adoptee experiences throughout their lives. Again, as previously stated, sadly in the DfE (2014) report, claiming a high percentage of adoptees being diagnosed with some form of mental health issue (See **section 2.3, fig 2, fig 3, fig 4**). However, none of the participants presented or stated any formal diagnosis, or mentioned severe mental health issues, relating to formal systems of mental health care. This does raise questions toward the current ‘practice’, and social systems of support, that feel a diagnosis is the only satisfactory means to support, and care for individuals presenting with psychological/emotional concerns (Breggin, 1993; DfE, 2014; Newnes, 2015; Sanders, 2005, 2006; Szasz, 2010).

### 7.6.1 Questioning attachment styles and theory

A large section of the literature also points to ‘attachment issues’ being the primary source of the adoptee’s vulnerability, with current literature suggesting that adoptees are

more susceptible to *developing* ‘insecure attachments’ due to the relinquishment from the birth mother/family (Brodzinsky, 2011; DfE, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Farr, Grant-Marsney & Grotevant, 2014; Grant-Marsney, Grotevant & Sayer, 2015; Hoopes, 1990; Javier et al., 2007; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009; Van London et al., 2007; Zaccagnino et al., 2015). However, given the findings from the data (see chapters 4, 5, 6), I’d argue that the adoptee has an insecure attachment from the *moment* the baby is relinquished by the birth mother, especially given the 9 months in-utero relationship that has been formed, in that time, with the birth mother and prenatal baby.

Relating to the participants, only participant Cathy formally stated any concerns or understanding of attachment theory, and how this was related to her blocks to her sexuality: *‘I think the blocks are my attachment issues and fear of intimacy and vulnerability. The expression of my sexuality is suppressed by those blocks.’*

Barth et al. (2005) query attachment theory, raising concerns to the predictability of child development, supported by Sroufe *et al.* (1999) study on this subject.

This proposes that future developing relations between the adoptee and adoptive parent/s is not solely determined on the attachment style.

If we relate this to the subordinate theme ‘familial undercurrents’ (see **section 6.4.2**), we can begin to see the family influence in this area and how attachment styles can be affected. Cathy felt pressure from her adoptive family to conform, although she found it hard to understand herself and behaviour as she was growing up.

This was mirrored by Marty, and the pressures from his adoptive parents to be ‘*a good boy*’ and conform to their wishes. Pan expressed this in relation to his sexuality and with ‘*a lot of pressure...to be straight*’, or heterosexual from his adoptive family. Vox felt controlled and smothered by his adoptive mother, with little interaction or support from his adoptive father as a proactive role model, which caused him anger and pain. It could therefore be argued,

that the participants could have an insecure attachment style to their adoptive parents, given the insecure nature of the relationships with their adoptive parents.

Out of the eleven participants only participants Kim, David and Marty made positive comments, and had an overall sense of regard for their adoptive parents, throughout the interview, which suggests a positive regard for their parents and may also suggest a secure attachment. Kim: *'Deep down they are good people and I love them.'*

David: *'They were my parents, and I never even called her Mum until five or six years ago when she was. I mean, she died and sort of like, she'd always been my mum really.'*

Marty: *'I felt very special'*

Participant Anna discussed how her adoptive mother was loving and caring when she was pre-teens suggesting a secure attachment initially, but then how she then became distant when she was a teenager, resulting in a changed insecure attachment style.

I can also attest for a secure attachment as a pre-teen from my adoptive parents, but then that attachment style changing to insecure as I became a teenager, feeling more and more misunderstood by my adoptive parents (see **Chapter 4**).

What the data infers is that, even in some cases, where there may have been secure attachments initially with the participants to ameliorate the initial insecure attachment formed by Verrier's (2009) 'primal wound', the feeling of vulnerability and insecurity as an adult adoptee was still dominate in their lives. The subordinate themes: Self as vulnerable (see **section 6.3.1**), Hiding (see **section 6.3.2**), and My pain (see **section 6.3.3**) demonstrate this vulnerability still prevalent in an adult adoptee's life:

David expressed how he holds himself back in relationships, for fear of being disliked: *'You don't always give your true self over, getting back to this, how can I adjust myself? How can I camouflage what somebody might not want to see, in order to be liked.'*

Noel talked of his hiding himself, so as not to be seen with fear of being hurt: *'That's how I dealt with it, I've just pushed it away and said well what you don't see, you don't know.'* Marty



showed how his public persona is seen by others and how different he is inside. For Cathy it was the fear and pain of not being ‘good enough’ or ‘flawed’.

Eva was still angry and her pain showed in her inability to be in relationship with her adoptive parents. Anna’s pain is still with the birth mother she can’t contact and the fear of a possible second rejection. Pan expressed a ‘deep pain’ from being adopted and all that has come from this experience. Vox is still longing for a resolve and peace regarding his adoption and his need to connect and know his ‘true self’. What seems apparent, irrespective of a secure attachment style, is the vulnerability within the adult adoptee is still predominate, therefore suggesting more intensive research to be conducted around attachment styles in adult adoptees.

The data raises serious questions as to the intervention and implications of a secure base/attachment style, and how this is changeable over time. We could even question the confidence and certainty that some theorists and government policies (DfE, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Farr, Grant-Marsney & Grotevant, 2014; Grant-Marsney, Grotevant & Sayer, 2015; Hoopes, 1990; Javier et al., 2007; Jordan & Dempsey, 2013; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Van London et al., 2007; Zaccagnino et al., 2015), place on the importance of secure attachment styles ‘overtime’, or the lack of acknowledgement of the initial ‘high potential’ toward insecure attachment, of the adoptee, from the relinquishment of the birth mother.

What would be more appropriate and consistent with the changing nature of relationships, correlates with Feeney, Passmore, & Peterson’s (2007) research. They suggest that the adoptee’s ‘internal working model’, which is integral to attachment theory, reflects and predicts behaviour and relating styles, suggesting a negative internal working model correlates with a negative outlook and experiencing of one’s life. If we relate this to the change effect of an ‘internal working model’ or concept of self, especially when engaging with psychotherapeutic intervention, and the complexity of the relational environment of the individual growing up; we can start to see that there is more involved than an initial secure

attachment with the adoptive parents. What is significant with an ‘internal working model’ or concept of self, is the experiential process and how this contributes to a developing sense of self (Bowlby, 1980, 2005; Feeney, Passmore & Peterson, 2007; Rogers, 1959; Schofield & Beek, 2006). Therefore, what the data suggests is that an initial secure attachment is ‘not enough’, due to the adoptee’s inherent insecure attachment from the relinquishment of the birth mother. I recommend, that at a minimum base level, a sustained secure attachment overtime is needed to help support a growing and developing positive, confident and secure concept of self or ‘internal working model’ to develop within the adoptee. However, this brings us back to Barth et al. (2005) and their concerns regarding the possible limits to attachment theory as a precursor for predictive development of the child. Given these concerns, by Barth et al. (2005), it would highlight even more a need for a secure attachment overtime with the primary carers, therefore to support and therapeutically counter, the initial insecure attachment from the birth mother and any external social relational negative influences by the ‘other’ that the adoptee may experience through the process of child, adolescent and adult development of an ‘internal working model’, self and sexuality – if we are to accept, especially through therapeutic intervention and support, the positive change effect of an individual’s concept of self (Anderson & Gerhart, 2007; Bower, 2010; Norcross & Wampold, 2011; Rogers, 1959, 1961; Spinelli, 2015).

Relating this to sexuality and sexual identity for the adoptee, the implications of an initial insecure attachment become apparent. This is also apparent with an initial secure attachment that changes to insecure attachment overtime, as highlighted above. Considering the influence of the insecure attachment on the adoptee’s self-formation and personal development.; this brings us to the subordinate theme ‘self as vulnerable’.

### 7.6.2 Self as vulnerable

Rogers' (1959) 'concept of self' exists of a gestalt of a perceived 'I' or 'me' in relation to cultural values and beliefs. Lawler (2014) takes the concept of a self/identity and brings it into a, *'wide-ranging and inclusive way to mean both its public manifestations...and the more personal, ambivalent, reflective and reflexive sense that people have of who they are.'* (p.7)

From a narrative perspective Polkinghorne (1990) signifies narrative structure and drama to self-development. For Gergen (2009) the westernised psychological and sociological 'concepts of self' originate in a misplaced 'reality of bounded being' constituting an individual mind which creates, *'alienation, loneliness, distrust, hierarchy, competition, and self-doubt.'* (p.61). This 'throws' into question the very concept of the 'internal working model' attributed to attachment theory, and cognitive psychology that assumes that learning, memory, attention, perception, reasoning, language, conceptual development, and decision making, all function within a mind mental concept (Beck & Haigh, 2014; Bruner, 1966; Piaget, 1962). Gergen (2009, 2011) sees the construction of the 'bounded self' as leading to societies, whereby the individual and the people become viable commodities, relationally devalued, based around consumerism and capitalistic economies.

The participants' view consistently flowed around a conceptual abstract understanding of how they perceived themselves, and the images, roles and categories they prescribed to (see **chapters 4, 5, 6**). This was also reflected and showed dependence and influence from their cultural, educational and socio-political environment (Elliot, 2011; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Lawler, 2014; Gergen, 2009). Therefore, all the participants were born and educated in the UK, live and work in the UK, are white ethnicity, and are embedded within the traditional, historical and socio-political nuances of British culture.

What became apparent throughout the data was a perceived vulnerability within the participants' self. They disclosed feelings of sadness, loneliness, fear, abandonment, anxiety and distress, which were related to their adoption, and how they 'made sense of their life

experiences'. For participants Marty, Cathy, Pan, Vox, Eva, Anna, David and me this also related to aspects of our sexuality.

Marty's concern is based in his fear of the subject of sex, and how this creates anxiety within him. Cathy had vulnerability regarding her adoptive father's approval of her sexual partner choices: *'I went through a phase of thinking my fear of having a relationship with a woman was because I would disappoint my adoptive father.'*

Pan described the implicit message from his family to be heterosexual and anything outside of this was not acceptable. This was evident with Vox and his need to hide his gay sexuality. Anna and David both expressed the need for emotional closeness and how sex provided this.

What became apparent with all the participants (see **section 7.5 & 7.5.1**), were the negatively perceived relational, contextual and social experiences that had contributed to the participants' understanding and vulnerable 'self/identity image' that each participant presented in the data.

This corresponds with wider sociological theory that posits that the 'self' is not an isolated entity located within the human mind, but a relational experience constituted through human language, cultural living, and self and other engagement (Brickell, 2006b; Burkitt, 2012; Burr, 2003; Elliott, 2011; Gergen, 2009; Rahman & Jackson, 2010).

If we look at the verbatim quotes taken from the data (see **chapters 4 and 5, and sections 6.3.1, 6.3.2 & 6.3.3**), we see how the participants narratively construct a 'vulnerable self' through the discourses of adoption and sexuality. This discourse of vulnerability of the adoptee is more than evident within the adoption literature (see **sections 2.3 & 2.5**). Verrier's (2009) 'primal wound'; Lifton's (1970/2009, 2010) adoptee as being 'lost' and then 'found'; Eldridge (1999) 'disintegrated parts of an adoptee's identity/self'. Harris' (2012) 'Chosen', the adoptee is 'picked' from a list of other children, desperately waiting to be the 'lucky ones', and given a home and family. The DfE (2014) report showing high levels of young adoptees being

given psychiatric diagnoses, consistently, pathologizing the adoptee. The Guardian (2016) newspaper's adoption section also signifies this.

Watkins' (2005), however, citing Braidotti's (1994) 'nomadic subjectivity' doesn't see the adoptee's self-formation as intrinsically damaged, accepting the self as fluid/unfixed in process, similar to Rogers (1961) concept of self. Though, Watkins (2005) does agree that the abandonment and grieving are fundamentals to an adoptee's life; echoing Verrier's (2009) primal wound.

However, the literature, denoting the adoptee as vulnerable and disposed to feelings of loss, is only one aspect of a discourse. Other aspects are created through the adoptees' experience and relational living, social media, political influences, cultural values and beliefs, and then how this is narratively constructed through the available language. The adoptee through their experiential living, and then discursive 'construction of self', creates and maintains the 'adoptee as vulnerable'.

### **7.6.3 Active role of vulnerable self**

The participants in this research, through the methods employed, demonstrate the discursive 'construction of self' (see **chapters 4, 5, 6**). Noel constructs his identity of usefulness of being needed. Marty brings in his aspect of loneliness. Kim shares her active participation in constructing her hippie identity. David explains his construction of distance and boundary in his sense of self. Pan tells of his ability to adapt and change to 'fit in' and not be seen as vulnerable, the social chameleon. Cathy shows her multiplicity of vulnerable foundations to her identity and self.

What the data suggests is that the adoptee (although experiencing and presenting as vulnerable) plays an active role in the construction of this aspect of self, demonstrating agency. Rahman & Jackson (2010) claim, '*Agency is the capacity for intentional action...and [the ability] to decide on appropriate courses of action.*' (p.155)

Hence presenting a somewhat paradoxical view in relation to a ‘vulnerable’ sense of being, if we are to understand and agree ‘vulnerable’ meaning the opposite to Rahman and Jackson’s above definition. This would correspond to counselling and psychotherapy literature that present the concept of ‘vulnerable’ in the context of the person feeling non-autonomous, powerless, and in need of help (BACP, 2015; Bond, 2015; Norcross & Wampold, 2011; Rogers, 1957; 1961, 1980; Spinelli, 2015). Therefore, to what degree is the adoptee, and participants in this study, actually ‘vulnerable’? Or could we ask, is ‘vulnerability’ one of many, ‘*appropriate courses of action*’ (Rahman & Jackson, 2010, p.155), in the process of agency?

Sawicki (1991 cited in Burr, 2004, p.121), relating to Foucault’s (1988) latter work, postures reflexivity as the proactive form of the subject being constituted by discourse. Etherington’s (2000, 2004) reflexivity, and. Moustakas’ (1991) process of heuristic research, both demonstrate how this can be a vehicle for self-development. The fundamentals of qualitative research could also be argued as constituting the ‘reflexive process’ through engaging the participant, either through questionnaires and/or interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005, 2011; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; McLeod, 2011).

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) make an interesting claim, regarding social commentary, referring to Atkinson and Silverman (1997) concept of western culture being an interview society. If the interview is an integral element to westernised society, and functions as a social method for public self-construction, the audience or other, would seem to serve as a means to this end.

Again, this supports sociological theory, especially Goffman’s (1959) *dramaturgical* theory of self as social actor, which suggests that social selves are managed and presented performances in relation to others in society, and also ‘symbolic interactionism’ (see Brickell, 2006b; Blumer, 1962; Plummer, 1996b), where social roles play a significant part in the construction and perceived understanding of a self. From an existential point, this also aligns with Spinelli’s (2015) concept of the human person being fundamentally embedded and

constituted within a relational context. The process of reflexivity therefore seems inherent in the relational process of living.

This raises several questions in relation to the adoptee and their self-formation, and the social and personal influences that can contribute to this. Again, from the initial point of birth we can go back to attachment theory and the influences this can have on the adoptee (see **section 7.6.1 above**). If the participants did and do have agency in the construction of their ‘vulnerable self’; it still raises questions as to the role and influence of the ‘other’ in this process (see **sections 6.4.1, 6.4.2, 6.4.3, 6.4.4 & 7.5.1**). It could be argued that the individual is proactive in ‘self-construction’ as looked at above, yet how this construction is presented or perceived by the individual, is somewhat dependent on social influence and relational living (Brickell, 2006b; Burkitt, 2012; Burr, 2003; Elliott, 2011; Gergen, 2009, 2011; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000)

When relating to the process of data collected for this research, we could also raise the question as to how influential was I, as interviewer, in the participants’ presentation and construction of their ‘vulnerable self’. If we adopt Gergen’s (2011) concept of the ‘relational being’, we see the interview process as more than social influences. Gergen (2009) infers a, ‘*process of co-action*’ where meaning and understanding is co-created, ‘*Words and actions come into meaning as they function in our relationship.*’ (p.99) What Gergen (2009, 2011) is claiming is that in every way we exist in society, from talking, crying, laughing, walking, behaving, responding to each other becomes knowable through collaborative action. For Gergen (2009, 2011) there needs to be a shift from an individualistic separate mind, to a ‘relational mind’ where meaning is constituted in the process of relating.

Therefore, this raises several questions to the ‘co-action’ process in the interview, and what factors influenced the relational meaning created by the participant and me.

Did my association as a fellow adoptee, allow a greater freedom to the participants to express their ‘vulnerable self’? Did my role as a psychotherapist, implicitly come into the

interview, facilitating an empathic and accepting process of their ‘vulnerable self’? Would an interviewer, not trained in psychotherapy, and/or a non-adoptee, have facilitated the same processes, and assisted in the participants’ construction of a ‘vulnerable self’? What possible systems of power were working through the relational process in the interview, to influence the production of a ‘vulnerable self’?

This also highlights possible influences and concerns when working with adoptees in a therapeutic context and also researching adoptees. From a therapeutic perspective, it raises questions to the adoptee’s self-formation, and the vulnerability or ‘fragility’ of this within a therapeutic relationship. If the adoptee is susceptible to influence from the ‘other’, this highlights the need for therapeutic interventions that do not impinge or stifle the adoptee’s autonomous process and development. Therefore, interventions that respect and facilitate the adoptee’s autonomous process and development of self are more appropriate, for example ‘non-directive and person-centred approaches’ (Copper, O’Hara, Schmid & Bohart, 2013; Rogers, 1951, 1957, 1961; Schmid, 2015).

This raises further concern to the political nature of counselling and psychotherapy in relation to marginalised or ‘vulnerable client groups’ like adoptees. However, given the above concerns of the adoptee’s ‘fragile sense of self’, and possible ways to facilitate a greater supportive therapeutic role with this; let’s first look at the inherent vulnerable nature of adoptees.

#### **7.6.4 The vulnerable nature of the adoptee**

Previously mentioned in sections 2.3, 7.6 and 7.6.2 the literature points to a fundamental vulnerability within the adoptee. This is strongly advocated by Verrier’s (2009) concept of the ‘primal wound’ denoting a deep primordial detachment from the birth mother,



an essential wound that may not even be able to be healed. If we relate this to attachment theory (see section 7.6.1), this would suggest from the moment of relinquishment from the birth mother, the adoptee has a predisposition toward an inherent insecure attachment. Regarding the participants' data this 'primal wound', and insecure attachment style, could be attributed to the superordinate theme 'The Feminine' (See **section 6.5**) and the subordinate themes accompanying this (see **sections 6.5, 6.5.1, 6.5.2, 6.5.3, 6.5.4**).

The subordinate theme 'Mother' (see **section 6.5.1**) expressed the participants' thoughts and feelings around their experiences of their mothers in their lives.

Cathy had had a good relationship with her birth mum and found recognition and acceptance in her mother's searching for her. Pan, also had an on-off relationship with his birth mum, and found it hard to initially connect emotionally with her. Marty found it difficult to see any other woman in his life coming close to his idolatry of his birth mum, even though she'd now stopped contact with him. Eva yearned for a mother, an adoptive mother that could have loved her for her, and a birth mother that she could find. Kim only briefly mentioned her birth mother, but held onto the information her adoptive mother had given her about her. Anna found solace in her birth name and the connection it gave her to her birth mother. Noel was angry with his birth mother and her '*double rejection*' when he had gone searching for her.

From the participant's experiences, we can understand the significance and importance the adoptee places on their relationship with their birth mother. Although there is nothing new regarding this aspect of an adoptees' vulnerability in relation to the birth mother (see **section 2.3**). Therefore, it would seem likely that the data does support Verrier's (2009) concept of the 'primal wound'. This is apparent as all the participants in this research shared strong opinions and feelings toward their birth mothers, expressing on some level the importance she has in their existence.

The subordinate themes ‘searching’ (See **section 6.5.2**), ‘iconic’ (See **section 6.5.3**) and ‘stereotype’ (See **section 6.5.4**) highlight the influential prominence the ‘mother’ or ‘feminine ideal’ has within the participants’ lives.

Marty as a child would dream about a mysterious woman, who he attributes to an image of his birth mother, and the ‘*allure or some kind of pull towards*’ her. Eva after leaving her husband also went searching for the feminine ‘other’ through her dating of different women. Anna states the icon of mother, expressing the feminine quality of nurturing the child. David gave a somewhat stereotypical male perspective on the stereotype of women: ‘*Emotional closeness, I’ve been there, but I think that’s where maybe the female nurture or the female psyche is different.*’

However, as it would seem likely that the research data does support Verrier’s (2009) ‘primal wound, I believe it does not substantiate it, and leaves open questions regarding her concept. Therefore, I do contest Verrier’s (2009) concept of the ‘primal wound’. What the data and participants’ experiences convey are experiences that have had a bearing on the adoptee’s ‘sense of self’, sexuality, and self-formation. What I infer, from the data and literature in this research, is that there is an ‘inherent potential toward vulnerability’ within the adoptee’s existence that has an initial start with the relinquishment of the birth mother causing an insecure attachment style. There are possible ways to ameliorate this first experience of loss, which have been discussed in section 7.6.1, regarding attachment styles and self-formation. However, if the adoptee’s needs are not met in the initial stages of their life, a compounding of vulnerability starts to accrue and develop within the adoptee. This is no more apparent with the continuing subordinate theme ‘My pain’ (see **section 6.3.4**), which highlights the adult adoptee’s continued unresolved pain and vulnerability within their lives.

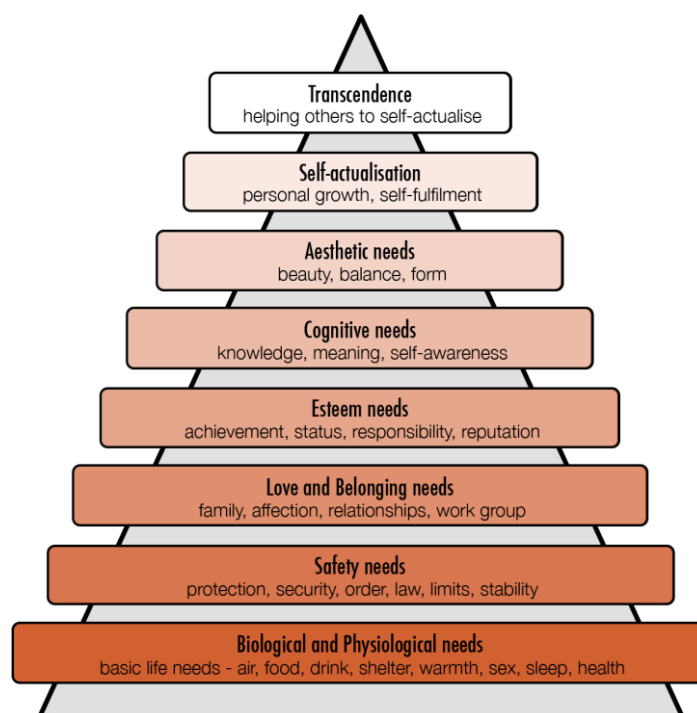
From the point of adoptee’s sexuality, we can see from the data, how the adoptee’s unresolved experiences and compounding of vulnerability impacts on their sexual relations, sexual understanding, and sexual identity. Therefore, an unresolved ‘inherent potential

toward vulnerability' will have an impact on the adoptee's developing sexuality and 'sense of self'. If we move onto the subordinate theme 'Using sex to meet a need' below, we can see how the potential toward vulnerability can influence an adoptee's sexuality.

### 7.6.5 Using sex to meet a need

Taking Maslow's (1970) human being's hierarchy of needs, he introduces a system that must be met for the survival and development of the human being. Due to the hierarchy, as the needs get met, the development and motivational drives of the human change; for example (see **Fig.6**) at the basic level are our biological and physiological needs (food, air, shelter, sex and sleep, etc.), moving upwards to safety needs, love and belongingness, esteem, and cognitive needs, etc.

**Figure 6 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**



Maslow's (1970) motivational theory would suggest that each individual has a basic need for sex, and once this basic need (with the accompanied needs, see Fig.6) has been met,

then the person can then move on to the next 'needs' stage of their hierarchy. Yet it was through sex (Maslow's basic need), and the use of sex, that the participants (see **chapter 4, 5 and section 6.2.1**) were attaining and meeting other needs, above Maslow's basic need.

For example, participants Cathy, Pan, Sam, Anna, and me, used the function of sex to meet a need for love and acceptance. Participants David, Eva and Marty used it for a combination of love, and a means to self-esteem. This would refute Maslow's claims, and question: can sex be seen as 'so' basic a need in the human's existence? Can sex be solely determined as a biological drive?

Again, this raises questions to the nature vs nurture argument within the social sciences (see **section 2.6**). Can sexuality be attributed to purely innate tendencies (nature), or social influences (nurture)?

The data from this study would suggest that the purely essentialist (nature) argument is flawed. To substantiate the essentialist argument, the participants' data 'would have to suggest' that they only used sex to meet their biological tendencies; however, the complexity and varied nature of the data (see **chapters 4, 5, 6**) would suggest otherwise.

The participants cited high levels of social influence regarding their sexuality and how it was expressed, which have been discussed in sections 7.5 and 7.5.1. The social influence has also been discussed in relation to the adoptee's vulnerability in sections 7.6, 7.6.1, 7.6.2., and 7.6.3.

The questions arise and pose in relation to these two factors of social influence and adoptee's vulnerability: If the adoptee has an 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' and due to this is more susceptible to increased 'social and 'other' influence', how does this affect their sexuality and sexual development and self-formation?

From the data, we see the adoptee use their sexuality to gain something from the 'other'. Rogers (1951) believed that behaviour is *'basically the goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced, in the field, as perceived'*. (p.491) Sex therefore, for the

adoptivee in this research, is a goal-directed form of behaviour to satisfy an individual's needs, which for Rogers (1959) would be the organism's natural tendency to actualise and fulfil its potentials within the social world. Schimdt (2006), agrees with this concept, and sees sexuality and all that it can encompass to the individual, as a direct outgrowth of the actualising tendency of each person.

The concerns arise for an adoptivee with an 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' to be open to forms of oppression, abuse, and discrimination around their sexuality or use of. This highlights a serious ethical concern for adoptivees around their sexual behaviour and sexual understanding, especially as a child or adolescent, with the adoptivee possibly leaving themselves vulnerable or open to abuse, or abusing, due to the desperate 'inherent' need to satisfy a need to feel accepted, loved, cared for, protected, safe, and wanted. The subordinate theme 'using sex to meet a need' demonstrates this very factor. The participants' sexual behaviour and sexual promiscuity at times in their lives, was shared by participants Cathy, Anna, David, Pan, Sam, and Eva. This reveals the concerns and potential dangers to these activities, for the adoptivee and others involved.

The possible issues regarding sexual activity for vulnerable groups can include sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, the possibility of abusing, pornography, addiction, and family and social exclusion, and relationship and family breakdown (Heasley & Crane, 2003; Kimmel & Plante, 2004; Lehmler, 2014; Le Vay & Baldwin, 2012).

This also raises concerns regarding gender formation and gender stereotypes within western culture, and how sexuality is associated with this. From a sociological perspective, it could be argued, that sex and sexual practice is largely associated with gender formation from an early age (Brickell, 2006a, 2006b; Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1977; Rahman & Jackson, 2010). Thus, it is the attribution of gender through social relations, in the social world, that gives the individual a predetermined gendered identity. This is seen in sections 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.2.4 and 4.2.5, my poem *Freedom* and the dialogue *A Father's Attempt to make 'the Boy' Straight* show

the cultural gender stereotypes pervading and trying to shape an individual to fit 'sexually and gendered' within the northern working-class culture. This can also be seen in the subordinate theme 'stereotypes' and 'iconic'. The participants expressed the westernised genderism through their understanding and language.

Marty talked of the iconic mother role. Cathy expressed her concerns and challenges to female stereotyping. Eva shared her need to be a '*good mum*'. Anna disclosed her uneasiness with female 'judgmental chatter' and how with men she felt safer due to a stereotyped idea of straight-talking men. Pan highlighted the heteronormativity in his experiences of growing up, and David expressed the cultural media image of the perfect female body.

However, Rahman and Jackson (2010), make an interesting point regarding the developmental stages of gender attribution and the child's and adolescent's understanding of this. They warn us not to assume, '*that when a child uses gender labels they have the same meaning for the child that they would for an adult.*'(p.174) They (2010) have two main points, citing Thorne's (1993) classic study on Primary school children in the USA: the first suggests that gender can be more ambivalent and particular depending on social context, class and subculture; and the second is to substantiate the role of gender categories *per se* within a given culture, and how these are incorporated into, and shape, the individual's '*evolving sense of self*'.

This gender '*evolving sense of self*', once reaching adolescence, then becomes sexualised through the social worlds the individual lives in. This could be through media, group values, education, literature, TV, peer pressure, and social experience. Thorne's (1993) study again supports these claims, and like Gagnon and Simon (2005) suggests that, *it is*, the social influences and meanings that bring about the sexualised gendered individual, not the biological and physical changes of puberty. This can also be seen through the participants' data, and has again been discussed in sections 7.5 and 7.5.1.

Another interesting aspect to the adoptee's need of 'using sex' is to gain the attribution and feelings of love and acceptance. Beall and Sternberg (1995) argue that the need to belong

and love, which they consider as social constructs, are needs humans *learn* to understand, and feel, they need through the social worlds in which they live (Burr, 2004; Gergen, 2009, 2011; Soloski, Pavkov, Sweeney, & Wetchler, 2013). Therefore, it could be further argued then that human *needs* are culturally dependent, dependent on the social worlds in which we live. Yet this does not account for human biology and physiological functions within the human, especially regarding attachment theory, human developmental needs, and sexual development.

For Rogers (1959), Schimd (2006), and Lehmiller (2014), the human triad of the biopsychosocial model, would seem the obvious way forward. This would incorporate Rogers (1959) and Schmid's (2006) organismic experience (biology) in the personal (psychological) and social worlds (sociological) of the individual, suggesting that human *needs* are born out of a, '*complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.*' (Lehmiller, 2014, p.21).

Returning to the concept of love and the need to acquire this; Storm and Storm (1984) in a study of love, sex and intimacy, interestingly found that sex was undesirable unless accompanied with love and intimacy. Again, this shows that sex *per se* is not an isolated function or act, but dependent on the relationship to love and intimacy, which is supported by the participants in this study whose need was for love and their use of sex to acquire it.

Conversely, this does raise questions as to a person's understanding of love. Lehmiller (2014) believes love means, '*different things to different people...love as an emotion...in terms of how they feel...love as a behaviour...in terms of the things they would do or sacrifice...for another.*' (p.204) Hendrick and Hendrick (2003), however, see love as consisting of two forms: passionate and companionate, and how this is displayed in our experiences.

Sternberg (1986) sees love as an encompassed triangular theory/concept through direct links to passion, intimacy and commitment, and the levels between the three. This would suggest that sex is then a process, (physical act), to express the varied levels of these three concepts, dependent on relationship.

If we refer back to the stereotypes within our western culture, which were highlighted by the participants in this research; Rosenthal, Gifford and Moore (1998), when referring to sex and love, suggest that there exists a double standard for women and men in sexual relationships. Presenting that it is more socially acceptable for men to have casual sex and partners, denoting a virile macho-man, whereas for women, who are sexually active, risk their reputation and fear the disapproval associated with casual sex. *‘Because of this, they are likely to interpret casual encounters as meaningful and long term [associated with love], so are less likely to interpret these as risky.’* (p.3)

Participants Anna and Cathy express this:

Anna: *‘I felt like they would love me forever because I had had sex with them.’*

Cathy: *‘I didn’t have any problems with having sex with people because I was seeking acceptance and sex was one way to get it.’*

Sternberg’s (1996, 1998, 2006) theory of ‘love as a story’ encompasses this stress on personal interpretation of social constructs and social acquisition. The theory is built around an individual’s creating of a story around their experience of love within an already established cultural matrix/framework. Watts and Stenner (2014) support this and present the westernised ‘feminizing of love’, and the ‘masculinizing of sex’, and how sex for men and women are stereotyped differently.

Yet in this study only one male participant David used sex in this stereotypical way, ironically with an explicit need for self-esteem, and an implicit need for love associated with this. Participants Sam, Pan, and me, also used sex to meet a need for love, acceptance and a bolstering of self-worth, which questions the male stereotype.

Yet, the women in the study do support Watts and Stenner’s (2014) ‘feminizing of love’ concept, which used sex to meet a need for feelings of love, acceptance and the sense of worth associated. This also does support the cultural stereotype for women associating and



desiring sex only in conjunction with love, which is support by media portrayals (Gold, 2009; Hodgekiss, 2011; Manson, 2013; Rahman & Jackson, 2010).

If we relate this to the previous ethical considerations of the adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability', it could be argued that we also have to take into account the possible influence of cultural gender stereotyping, and how this informs and influences the adoptee's sexuality. For the adult adoptees in this study, the act of sex and their sexuality were available and useful functions to get other needs met. This in turn informed aspects of their sexual identity and how they understood their self/identity within their cultural worlds, contributing to their self-formation. This again raises concerns to practitioners and health-care workers that support, help, educate, inform, and therapeutically encounter the adoptee. As previously stated at the end of section 7.6.2, it raises questions to the adoptee's self-formation, and the vulnerability or 'fragility' of this within a 'helping/supportive relationship. If we are to support the adoptee, we need to 'adopt' 'helping/supportive interventions' that do not impinge or stifle the adoptee's autonomous process and development. This leads me to the next section on the political nature of therapy when working with adoptees and disenfranchised/marginalised group members.

## **7.7 The political nature of therapy for vulnerable groups**

If we espouse the 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' of the adoptee, it could be posited that my influence as a psychotherapist, and fellow adoptee, facilitated a process for the participant to construct a culturally held aspect of adoptee self as 'adoptee is vulnerable'. If this is the case, then this also shows, as previously highlighted in section 7.6.1, the need for care and attention to be shown to the adoptees' susceptibility to the influence of the 'other' in relationship.

Gadmer (1975) claims:

*Long before we understand ourselves in retrospective reflection, we understand ourselves in self-evident ways in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-reflection of the individual is only a flicker in the closed circuits of historical life [tradition].* (p. 245)

Tradition, if Gadamer is correct, is the inescapable rituals, values, mores, and beliefs of any given culture. Rogers (1959) called these introjected values; values that are inherent within the social groups we belong to; values that we as children and young people unquestionably take on as our own from our families, institutions and social networks, the *everyday* of our lived social worlds. Rahman and Jackson (2010) concur:

*Everyday culture is meaningful and includes language to beliefs and attitudes; popular culture such as advertising, music, movies and television; and cultural practices, like modes of dress, behaviours and lifestyles...How humans act is not 'natural' but based on social norms (or expectations) of behaviour according to our place within social structures and our identities.* (p.135)

Feltham (2010) from a counselling and psychotherapy perspective claims and highlights our 'everyday practices' and the harm they can do:

*Therapy and its linked concerns for emotional intelligence and good social relations highlight the damage done to children, the vulnerable, and indeed to all of us, by thoughtless brutal traditions.* (p.8)

I think I can safely say, without really giving any academic reasoning or support, that this is somewhat evidently prevalent within our cultural worlds; switch on the TV, listen to the radio, and read a newspaper to experience the harm and oppression that human beings exert upon each other.

This also raises questions toward morality and the therapist's ability to challenge Feltham's (2010) 'thoughtless brutal traditions'?

Morality, for Gergen (2009), is the coordination of our talk and actions within our social groupings and contexts; asserting, ‘we establish a right way to do things’ (p.32). He further claims, ‘criticism’s, attacks, stares, and the like, are all means of sustaining...a *moral order*.’ (p.69 *original emphasis*) This is similar to Harold Garfinkels’ (1967) morality and his ethnomethods<sup>29</sup>, whereby there is a trusted and unspoken sustained agreement to act and to interrelate consistently; ‘moral problems arise’ when individuals violate and transgress these consistently established and trusted acts, resulting in sanctions from the social group (Locke & Strong, 2010, p.198). Rogers (1959) claimed these sanctions, criticisms, stares and scoldings we receive as children to uphold this *moral order*, create conditions of worth; conditional ways of being and ‘going along’ to fit and conform, so we can continue to receive a sense of acceptance, love and belonging from our family members and social groups.

It was clear with some of the participants that they had experienced first-hand the brutal traditions being espoused by their parents and culture.

Noel: *‘Well not just me, my sister as well. We both got it. He was a bit of a drinker, well he wasn’t a bit of a drinker, he was a lot of a drinker which didn’t help. Often when he’d had a few drinks, he was heavy-handed more than he would be sober.’*

Eva: *‘My mum was quite cruel really. I wasn’t really allowed to develop naturally, as a child to just be. She would get very angry.’*

Cathy: *‘I remember once my adoptive mother, and this was really close to when she died, indicated to me that she knew I was sexually active and she called me a slut or some similar term.’*

Vox: *‘Early on you learn not to trust anyone or anything because you have already suffered through the horrible lie that is adoption.’*

This was more than evident within my social world as I was also growing up (see **sections 4.2.3, 4.2.5, 4.2.6**). To continue to receive the acceptance, belonging and love from

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<sup>29</sup> Ethnomethods, to quote Hilbert (cited in Locke & Strong, 2010, p.199), ‘are social practices whereby members orient to a pre-supposed social-structural order, reifying and reproducing it in the course of their activity and imposing its reality on each other as they go’.

my family and social group, I behaved accordingly; especially denying my same sex attractions, feelings, and effeminate mannerisms that did not fit within the *moral order* of the northern working-class members of our society. Rahman & Jackson (2010), highlight the dangers:

*[T]o challenge the [gender assumptions] in everyday life would not only be exhausting and socially disruptive, but would risk being seen as socially incompetent, eccentric or in need of psychiatric treatment. (p.163).*

This again clearly confirms the structural powerbase that heteronormativity gives to those that 'perform' socially acceptable gender roles and the consequences to those that do not.

This then leaves morality in a distinctively questionable position. If morality is a social order defined and created by a group; this then raises the question: which social group's morality is the 'correct' one? And if the answer is culturally bound and specific to the culture; how then do we stop potential oppression, discrimination, and prejudice between warring factions? If the answer is a legislative matter based in equality and diversity (Equality Act, 2010); then the answer is in abiding by the law (well at least in this country). But does this create tolerance and acceptance, or fear of the consequences of not adhering to the governmental *moral order*? A greater penalty will come from transgressing the governmental *moral order*, with a financial, social or personal cost, than the criticism or silence from your family members, the worst-case scenario being incarceration followed with social stigma.

If the concept of morality is left precariously hanging, where does this leave therapy and the therapist?

*The location of distress is clearly a political moment in therapy theory and practice. It reveals something of the inherent view of destiny and human nature, and strongly indicates the nature of the 'treatments' endorsed. Along the way it can be seen to serve the status quo or offer resistance to it. (Sanders, 2006, p.10)*

Sanders' quote is of particular importance to the practitioners of the person-centred approach (PCA) and any other form of therapy that views the client from a personal and social perspective of 'potentiality'. Inherent in the PCA is a fundamental belief in the client's ability to self-direct and find the answers to their issues (Rogers, 1951, 1957, 1959, 1986; Cooper, O'Hara, Schmid & Bohart, 2013; Schmid, 2014). This potentiality is inherent in the person's ability or tendency to 'actualise' given an optimum relational climate, built on the genuine therapist's offering of the attitude and process of acceptance and understanding (Rogers, 1957, Schmid, 2015). Problems arise when the relational climate that we experience in our social worlds is not optimum, which causes a thwarting or blocking of the person's actualisation resulting in an incongruence or sense of anxiety between the person's actual lived experience and the perceived experience. This perceived experience is filtered through the individual's concept of self which has been shaped and continues to be developed through their cultural values and beliefs, and relational engagements (Rogers, 1959).

The significance of the PCA belief in the person's inherent ability toward 'potentiality' is simply clarified by Mearns (2006):

*In the vast majority of contexts we are working in institutions where our ideology does not belong – indeed, it is often at odds with the prevailing ideology...most institutions to which we attach are 'deficiency model' orientated...we are being, whether we like the term or not, 'political subversives'. (p.137)*

The political and therapeutic ramifications for the adoptee are profound. The very notion presented before regarding the adoptees' 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' and their susceptibility to social influence (see **section 7.6.2**) again highlights the political, ethical and therapeutic considerations that should be considered.

There is also an implicit challenge to and explicit question to practitioners and helping professionals that 'adopt' a more directive, psycho-educational, and authoritarian stance toward the adoptee, or client. Given the consideration to the adoptee's 'inherent potential

toward vulnerability' and the need to employ more egalitarian, non-directive, mutually embracing interventions or help: can you as a practitioner meet this *need* in the client adoptee? Are you able to ethically work in this way, to meet the adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability', to facilitate a beneficial and non-maleficent relationship with the adoptee?

There are critiques of the person-centred approach or humanistic approaches that adopt these beliefs, claiming that person-centred therapy (PCT) over-emphasises the human's innate capacity for empathy and that Rogers' theory was overly optimistic in self-actualisation (Quinn, 1993). Ryan (1995) claims that PCT does not take into account cultural and social factors which contribute to a person's attitudes and behaviors claiming PCT to be overtly individualistic. Kensit (2000) also states some interesting concerns regarding non-directivity in PCT and client acceptance, stressing the point of client self-responsibility and posing the question in relation to sociopathy 'will the client assume responsibility for their actions or be given freedom to exercise their dysfunctional behavior...?'

I think we can easily put these criticisms to rest, in response to Ryan, Rogers' person is implicitly embedded within the social world, incorporating and being shaped by cultural and social introjected values which results in the development of conditions of worth associated with these, which more than takes into account social factors. Quinn's comment seems slightly misplaced as Rogers' theory does not guarantee an optimistic self-actualisation or inherent empathy, but suggests the *possibility* of these outcomes given an optimum relational climate. If the optimum climate is diminished then so is the possibility of a person's ability to potentially actualise their Self - we are therefore dependent on our social environments and the apparent social disharmonies that we experience, hence we have personal distress, war and discrimination. Regarding Kensit's point 'sociopathy' or 'antisocial personality disorder' (Grohol, 2015; NICE, 2015), again seems dependent on being shaped by one's social environment, therefore to counter this Rogers (1961) clearly addressed these 'misapprehensions' as the client through the process of non-directive therapy enters 'fully into

being a process', moving away from antisocial fixity with rigid constructs toward experiencing a range of feelings which are pro-social and relationally empathic; the client *'lives closely and acceptingly with their complexity' operating 'in a constructive [pro-social] harmony rather than sweeping him into some uncontrollably evil path'*(p. 176).

Regarding the adoptee or member of a vulnerable/marginalized social group, (who maybe more susceptible to social influence) the data shows the need to foster egalitarian relationships based on non-oppressive practice to facilitate the autonomous development of self within an adoptee or vulnerable client. It also raises a challenge and helps to inform practitioners that adopt more authoritarian, or directive ways of working. The wider political implications of this, demonstrates a challenge to oppressive authoritarian socio-political structures, through the fostering of this egalitarian stance toward the 'other'.

Schmid (2015) goes even further to propose and develop a person-centred sociotherapy; not only a therapy to help the person but also a therapy to help society at large. He suggests a model incorporating PCA principles to be applied to social factors, he proposes nine principles:

*[T]he image of the human as person; incorporating phenomenology, and an existential, intersubjective and dialogical philosophy; the epistemology of encounter and dialogue; a non-reductionist and therefore a holistic view of society; personal social ethics; a salutogenetic view, not a pathological view; therapeutic small group work; constant questioning of ideologies; and multiprofessionality and co-operation. (p.223)*

This then suggests a synergistic outlook toward the individualistic/collectivists argument, 'not an either or, but a both-and' approach.

Schmid's person-centred sociotherapy I believe is a possible call to change Feltham's (2010) 'thoughtless brutal traditions' and as Mearns (2006) said if we like it or not we are political subversives. As a therapist I stand counter to the 'pathologized expert model of the person' and shine a light for potentiality, marginalized groups and those that are

disenfranchised by dominate political power bases. Sadly, as can be seen in section 2.3 from the Department of Education (2014) report '*Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption*', a somewhat bleak forecast is presented for young adoptees. The report shows, how psychological/psychiatric labels are increasing with the pathologizing of adoptees, as having some form of mental health problem.

However, is this really the case, or are the young adoptees not being fully understood, accepted and given the correct social and psychological environments and relationships to help them develop? This increase in mental health labels seems to be a social phenomenon of this period (Joseph & Worsley, 2005; Mearns, 2006; Proctor, Cooper, Sanders, Malcolm, 2006; Schmid, 2015; Sanders, 2006; Watkins, 2005), as none of the adoptees in this study ever received or were considered as having any form of mental illness in the period of their lives spanning the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. If we are to help adoptees and people in vulnerable groups, it would seem that the wider political and social aspects of society need to be challenged. As Rogers said in his honorary lecture to the American Psychological Association, '*he urged us not to content ourselves merely with treating people "but to change the system"*' (Yalom cited in Schmid, 2015).

## **7.8 Summary**

In this chapter I have presented and integrated the literature and data, providing a discussion around the subject of adoptee's sexuality and self/identity. I presented and discussed the links between the influence of the 'other' in an adoptee's life regarding people in their family and wider social world, how the adoptee's vulnerability starts and can be compounded overtime, and the significance of the feminine concept and ideals that also influence the adoptee. I questioned aspects of attachment theory and attachment styles when considering the initial relinquishment of the birth mother, and how an initial secure attachment is 'not enough'. What I inferred is that an initial secure attachment needs to



continue overtime to support and positively influence the adoptee's developing self-formation and sexuality.

I also challenged Verrier's (2009) concept of the 'primal wound' and proposed a more fluid and encompassing concept that integrates the biopsychosocial aspects of the adoptee's life, presenting the adoptee with an 'inherent potential toward vulnerability', which has a direct bearing on the adoptee's developing sexuality and self-formation. From this concept, of adoptee with an 'inherent potential toward vulnerability', links were then highlighted and recommendations made toward non-oppressive and non-directive egalitarian practitioner 'ways of working' with an adoptee. Therefore, I highlighted the ethical, political and social considerations regarding the adoptee around their social living. This then posed the question to practitioners, to take these into consideration concerning their own ability, and/or training when working with an adoptee - thus demonstrating the adoptee's susceptibility to influence of the 'other', and their potential openness to abuse, abusing, and prejudice within their relational living.

In the next chapter, I will conclude this thesis by presenting the limitations of the study, suggesting further research, answering the research question, and exploring implications for practice.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the limitations of the research will be presented and discussed. I will revisit the originality of the research, highlight the ways in which the research can be furthered, and look at answering the research question through the relationship between adoption and sexuality. Suggestions, based on and from, the research, will also be presented regarding implications for practice; with the final concluding aspects of the study being from my personal reflections and reflexivity on the study.

### 8.2 Limitations of this study

The limitations of this study are the characteristics of design and methodology that impacted and influenced the interpretation of the research aims and findings. They are also the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which I initially chose to design the study, and the methods used to establish internal and external validity (see **section 3.8**). However, it could also be argued that those limitations are in fact, the qualities and means by which this qualitative study was designed, due to philosophical and methodological positioning (see **chapter 3**).

Given the critical philosophical and methodological bricolage approach of the research design, with a strong focus on highlighting individual and social discrimination (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Sims, 2015); the limitations to the study can be seen through the sampling of the participants. Only two Facebook groups were used to advertise for participants, limiting other possible areas for sampling adult adoptees. These groups were initially known by the researcher, so a process of purposive sampling was conducted, again highlighting limitations to the study.

The group members are predominately of white ethnicity, which demonstrates a discrimination/limitation in accessing, hearing, and giving ‘voice’ to adult adoptees that do

not identify as white ethnicity. This has clearly limited the findings to adult adoptees that identify as white. Although it could also be argued that Facebook is an international phenomenon of social networking, and incorporates a very wide inclusive membership, so access to the adoption groups by individuals, that do not identify as white ethnicity, was/is available.

Developing from this point, the context of UK residents only was also a limitation to the study, which again highlights the 'dominate white British' focus to the study, excluding those individuals that do not identify as British. However, given the specificity of design, the researcher wanted to conduct the study to be specific to UK adult adoptees to establish findings in this under-researched area (see **section 2.5**).

Regarding the participant's sexual identity/orientation; the majority of the participants (6 out of the 11) identified as heterosexual, with 2 identifying as bisexual, 2 as gay, and one as other. It could be argued that there is a limitation due to the predomination of participants identifying as heterosexual; although given the small percentage in the study, this limitation is not as dominate as the 93.7% heterosexual identity in the UK national surveys statistics (ONS, 2015). Therefore, the participants' sexual identity distribution in the study could possibly question the UK national statistics. However, it could also be argued that the qualitative limited number of participants in the study cannot be compared to a national quantifiable survey. What it does however suggest is that adult adoptees, perhaps, do not mirror the generalised public, suggesting further research in this area.

From a methodological point of view, it could be argued, that there are two areas that point to methodological limitation: 1. The postmodern perspective and tailoring of the research design, which the researcher has a clear bias and leaning toward, set an agenda and structuring of the research; although I feel this was addressed fully in researcher positioning (see section 1.3), and chapter 3 (see sections 3.3, 3.3.1, 3.3.2); and 2. The researcher was perhaps over adventurous with the research design and methodological methods used. Was

the inclusion of three forms of analysis necessary to the study? And did these three forms limit a deeper exploration, from a qualitative point of view, of a single methodology? I have, however, argued my case for the inclusion of the methodologies used and research design in chapter 3. Therefore, my presenting and arguing for the inclusion of Bricolage as a methodology in its own right in the UK, taking my lead from Kinchloe and Berry (2004) in the USA, which suggests and supports reasoning and implementation of the research design. However, the argument does still stand, from a current UK academy perspective, for a 'single' methodology to be used in this study, perhaps again signaling toward further research.

Relating to the lack of and limited secondary research on adoptee's sexuality (see **section 2.5**) is itself a limitation to the study. It could be argued that this lack of research specific to the area of adult adoptee's sexuality and self-identity, limited the laying of a foundational structure to this study and the possible reasons for the study. This does raise questions, as to why this is, and how this has then impacted on the study; this has, although, been explored and shown implicitly throughout the thesis. However, the main advantage to the lack of secondary research clearly shows an opening, and possible need, for conducting and undertaking more research within the subject of adult adoptee's sexuality. When relating this to implications for practice, any research that informs and supports a vulnerable social group, I believe is necessarily ethical and socially viable. This is also supported and suggested by the BACP and numerous researchers, academics and therapists that advocate and support counselling and psychotherapy research in the UK (BACP, 2015, 2016; Bond, 2004; Bower, 2010; Cartwright, 2007; Cooper, 2013; Cooper *et al.*, 2014; Dyer & Joseph, 2006; Etherington, 2003, 2004, 2007; McLeod, 2010, 2011, 2013; McLeod, Elliot & Wheeler, 2010; West, 2001, 2002, 2011, 2013).

Relating to the 'lens' of the researcher and the researcher's perspective; there is an argument for this research being limited by the 'lens/perspective', that I, as researcher have brought to this study (see **section 1.3**). In qualitative research, researcher and participant

'bias' therefore is more than a questioned occurrence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Gubba, 2000; Kinchloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011; McLeod, 2011, 2013; Ramey & Grubb, 2009; West, 2013). Therefore, there is acknowledgement and recognition that the researcher's values, beliefs and experiences, shape the 'lens' through which the data and literature have been evaluated. There is clear understanding, from a qualitative perspective, that another researcher would therefore bring a different lens to the data and the study. Due to the following points, it is therefore understood, that no universal claims will be proposed or made from this research. Rather the research will offer 'indicators' and suggestions toward possibilities, from a critical perspective, by the highlighting of areas for further research and implications to practice.

### 8.3 Originality of the thesis

There is within all doctoral research a question of originality and purpose to the research undertaken (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lynch, 2014; McLeod, 2011; Phillip & Pugh, 2015; Sanders & Wilkins, 2010). Phillip & Pugh (2015) outline fifteen criteria that can support and evidence the originality of your research, their criteria include:

*[U]ndertaking research in an area that hasn't been researched before; trying out something in Britain that has previously only been done abroad; making a synthesis that hasn't been made before; being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies; looking at areas that people in the discipline haven't looked at before. (p.74)*

From my research I will highlight several factors that make this research an original piece of research:

- The focus on adult adoptee's sexuality and sexual understanding: as previously mentioned in chapter 2, this is a limited area of research. There are two studies (Greenberg , 1993; Greenberg and Littlewood, 1995) making a direct link to

adoption and sexuality, but only through the concept of GSA (Genetic Sexual Attraction), which is discussed in section 7.1. There are also two passing mentions of adoptee narratives in Harris (2012), which mention sexuality from an adoptee's perspective. Therefore, this research adds to a limited area of research, by providing new knowledge, from adoptees' perspective of their sexuality and self/identity. The adoptive narratives give insight and knowledge to a lived experience, which has not been fully explored in the literature. This in turn also provides an opportunity and starting point to 'open up' this area of research and dialogue into adoptee sexuality.

- The links made to the adoptee's susceptibility to the influence of the 'other' in relation to their self-formation and sexuality: the literature and data presents the adoptee as a 'vulnerable group' within current western society. What this research has discovered are the links of vulnerability of the existing adoptee to the adoptee's sexuality and self-formation. The vulnerability 'plays' a significant role in how an adoptee presents and exists with their sexuality. This has significant importance regarding the adoptee in how they are supported and facilitated through their developmental stages of their life in relation to self-formation and sexuality. Adoption as a social and governmental intervention is then subject to growing areas of knowledge development theoretically, ethically and professionally. This research will add to this under-researched area; especially around implications for practice and how therapeutic and educational support for the adoptee is developed, which has been discussed in chapter 7.

- Awareness to and my developing concept of adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability', and how this influences the adoptee's self-formation and sexuality: this is a concept that challenges existing theoretical ideas that link to attachment theory and the 'primal wound'. What this concept of an adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' suggests and highlights is the complex social, psychological and biological inter-relational dynamics that can impact an adoptee's self-formation and sexuality due to their 'inherent potential toward vulnerability'. It is suggested that the adoptee's vulnerability can accrue and compound over time, if appropriate relational support interventions are not available to the adoptee throughout their growth and development. Arguing that establishing an adoptee's existence within just one theoretical paradigm is to miss, and demonstrate a clear omission, of the biopsychosocial dynamics, or holistic perspective, that exists in an adoptee's life. If we miss and omit areas of an adoptee's existence then we miss, and are unable, to provide a holistic support system to the adoptee through the intervention of adoption per se.
- The challenge to attachment theory's initial secure attachment, and how this can change to insecure overtime; and also, the need for a secure attachment to continue overtime to support and positively assist the adoptee's self-formation and sexuality: This aspect of the research highlights the lack of research around attachment styles, self-formation and sexuality of the adoptee. There is a theoretical, professional and governmental 'sense of security' in attachment theory and its underpinning belief in success of adoption as an intervention based on this theory. This research challenges this 'sense of security' and highlights the complexity of attachment styles when relating to the adoptee's

developing and changing self-concept and sexuality. This is demonstrated through the personal, familial, and wider social relations that exist within an adoptee's life. Again, adding new knowledge to support and develop adoption as an intervention for those involved in the adoption systems and processes.

- The links made to the socio-political and ethical implications of the adoptee in western culture, regarding their 'inherent potential toward vulnerability', and how this impacts on the adoptee's self-formation and sexuality: this aspect aims to focus attention from a critical theory perspective, challenging oppressive and discriminatory regimes that exist in western culture. Regimes of dominate white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied perspectives that disenfranchise and marginalised those that do not fit within these privileged social categories. I challenge this perspective in this research from within the context of adoption sexuality, to highlight and ameliorate potential and current oppressive practice toward the adoptee.

Therefore, this research challenges and proposes areas to question within adoption as an intervention. It provides new areas of knowledge as mentioned above to support and develop adoption as a social, professional and government intervention. It focuses on an under-researched area of adoption sexuality, to provide new knowledge to those that work and support adoptee's to better assist them ethically, theoretically, and professionally in the adoptee's personal growth, development and social living. If the wellbeing of the adoptee is fundamental to adoption as an intervention, as the literature suggests, then this research knowledge adds to this growing area.

Phillip and Pugh (2015) remind us, '*Do remember that because the PhD is awarded for 'an original contribution to knowledge' it remains an extremely important concept.*' (p.75) Therefore, it



is another reason, for me, to take seriously and to support my belief in the originality of this research study.

#### 8.4 Further research

The research of this study could be furthered in a number of ways:

- ❖ Again, if we approach this study from a qualitative critical perspective, the study could be furthered by incorporating participants from outside the UK. If this was the case then a specificity of the study could be made in relation to a national perspective, for example repeating the study for adoptee's in the USA, or European countries. This would gather further data and add to research in adoptee sexuality looking at national cultural and social influence.
- ❖ From within the UK, a demographic study could be made, focusing on regions within the UK, for example adoptee's in the South of England. Given that the data of this study came from solely adoptees in the North of England. This could add to a cultural perspective within the UK, to see if demographic social influence has any impact on adoptee sexuality.
- ❖ Relating to sampling from Facebook groups, and why only participants from the North of England responded to the advert. Questions and research into this could be conducted to see if adoptees from the North of England, feel they need, or engage with adoptee support groups, more than adoptees from the South of England. Is there a cultural, social value or belief that impact on adoptees from the South differently from adoptees in the North? Are adoptees from the South of England, possibly, more resilient, than adoptees from the North, and if so, why? Are adoptees from the North able to identify and acknowledge a *need* for support? Are adoptees from the South less able to identify this *need*, if a need is even apparent?

- ❖ Regarding attachment styles, further research could be undertaken with adult adoptees, focusing on their attachment styles from birth and how these have developed overtime. Focusing this within the context of adoptee sexuality and self-formation.
- ❖ From an ethnicity point of view, which was highlighted in limitations to the study, a focus could be made on non-white adoptees in the UK. This could add valuable research to understand if non-white adoptees have a different understanding or construction of their sexuality, and how this may compare, if at all, to white adoptees. Research has been conducted with transracial adoptees in the UK (Barn & Kirton, 2012; Harris, 2006, 2012, 2014; TAGG, 2013), so a focus on transracial adoptees' sexuality would add to this research area, and to adoption research as a whole. Again, with a focus for implications to practice, to add to research in these areas to support vulnerable marginalized client groups.
- ❖ The research could also be furthered by focusing on sexuality minority groups, as well as ethnicity, within the already existing minority group of adoption. This could be undertaken with a focus on adoptees that identify as LGBT. Through this process, a voice could be given to adoptees that feel marginalized, due to their sexual orientation/identity, within a majority that is dominated with heterosexuality. The research could assist with implications to practice, highlighting possible needs of the LGBT adoptee that are not, at this time, being supported or met by the social worlds that they exist in.

## 8.5 Answering the research question

*How do adult adoptees make sense of, and present, their sexuality and self/identity?* In answering this research question, and within the stated limitations of the research, it has been presented and shown through the data (see **chapters 4, 5, 6**) that adult adoptees 'make sense of' and present their sexuality and self/identity in a variety of ways. Given the methodological and

philosophical underpinning to the research and research design, a ‘particular’ and subjective perspective has been demonstrated through the research findings.

Although there was *also* a focus on shared experience and shared thematic themes, to present any similarities, or shared occurrences relating to the adult adoptees. However, even though shared themes and qualities were apparent (see **chapter 6**), there are no claims to any universal truths to be made from this qualitative analysis.

I believe the research findings, and thesis, have been successful in meeting the aims of the research and answering the research question, within the limitations of the research already stated. What has been highlighted and shown through the data findings, are the complexity of the psychological and social influence that impact upon an adoptee’s understanding of their sexuality, and self/identity within their socially relating world. Each participant is an individual within their own right, yet shared social influence, for example, class, education, politics, gender, and cultural demographic, can have a comparable bearing upon the adult adoptee’s sexuality and self/identity. Although, how that is interpreted and embedded within a person’s self/identity, is a personal and ‘particular’ experience for them.

What was apparent, and can be seen in the findings in chapter 6, is how sexual attitudes underpin the adoptee’s understanding of their self and sexuality. This correlated also from a socio-political perspective, showing how current UK cultural values and beliefs, presented themselves within and through the adoptee’s self-understanding and identity.

This was highlighted, as well, through the adoptee’s ‘inherent potential toward vulnerability’, and how this vulnerability ‘left the adoptee’ more susceptible to social influence and affect from the ‘other’. This ‘other’ could be individuals, groups, and/or cultural systems that the adoptee engages with throughout their life/world.

Therefore, it would seem from the data findings, and current literature, that adult adoptees are a vulnerable social group within the UK; and this vulnerability has a bearing on

how the adult adoptees understand and present their sexuality and self/identity. This is explored in more detail in the following section below.

## **8.6 The relationship between sexuality and adoption**

The literature for adoption, as previously stated, within the above sections and covered in section 2.3 is vast and wide. This is also true for the literature on sexuality, and all the varied areas (see section 2.4, 2.4.1) that this subject encompasses. Yet for adoptee's sexuality and sexual identity the literature, again as previously covered in section 2.3, is very limited.

Chapter 7 discussed and explored the research findings in relation to the literature that exists covering the subject of adoptee's sexuality and self/identity. What we explored were the relationships between the adoptee's concept of self/identity and how these aspects influenced their understanding and presenting of their sexuality. A significant aspect which was highlighted throughout the data was the relationship between the adoptee's sense of vulnerability, or as I propose an 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' (due to a predisposition to an insecure attachment style), within their existing world, and how this shaped their sexual identity and sexuality. Through the existing literature and the adoptee's presentation within the study, the adoptee as vulnerable 'played' a significant role. The shaping of the adoptee's vulnerability seemed to be initially through their relinquishment by their birth mother, and then from the compounding experiences and family dynamics with the adoptive family, and also again with the birth mother/father/family, if a reunion or contact had occurred.

The data suggests that it is these relationships within the adoption triad (adoptee, birth mother/father/family & adoptive parents) that influence the degree of vulnerability for the adoptee. Therefore, more negative perceived experiences result in a greater degree of vulnerability, and more positive perceived experiences resulting in a lesser sense of

vulnerability. This would also seem to correlate to some degree with the adoptee's sense of sexuality and self-identity, and to what degree this is expressed or not.

Given that we all exist within a social and cultural world, again the data would suggest that this vulnerability expressed itself, also in relation to the adoptee's wider social world and socio-political living (see chapters 4, 5 & 6). The 'other', therefore 'playing' a significant role in the shaping of the adoptee's sense of self, which is predominately seen through the family and extended family relations of the adoptee.

Interestingly, and touching on Verrier's (2009) ideas regarding the birth mother relationship, the searching or integrating of the feminine/mother within one's self seemed to be presented, and to some degree 'acted out' through the adoptee's sexuality and/or sexual relationships. This was seen with participant David, Sam, Cathy, Marty, Eva, and me. The data does suggest that the concept of the feminine and the need to connect to the feminine/mother had an influence on the above-mentioned participants' sexuality. This was also seen through the adoptee's use of sex to meet other emotional and psychological needs (see **section 6.2.1**).

Another predominate factor that was highlighted, were the adoptee's feelings of being accepted and understood for who they are in their own right, which had a bearing on the adoptee's sense of self-understanding and sexuality. The more that the adoptee fitted the westernised heterosexual stereotype, the easier, and less 'troubled' the adoptee felt regarding their sexuality and sexual identity (see **chapter 4, 5, 6**). The less the adoptee fitted the westernised heterosexual stereotype, the more possibility of feeling anxious, 'troubled' or not accepted by their social groupings and world. This non-acceptance, rejection, or intolerance, of course increased the 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' of the already existing adoptee.

This is also evident for marginalised group members that are not adoptees (Crooks & Baur, 2016; Diamond, 2008; Foucault, 1976; Gamson & Mood, 2004; Garbacik, 2013; Kimmel

& Plante, 2004; Milton, 2014; Lehmiller, 2014; Le Vay & Baldwin, 2012; Norton, 2008; Stein, 2011; Pearce, 2011; Plummer, 1981, 1996a, 2000, 2015; Rahman & Jackson, 2010; Stainton-Rogers & Stainton-Rogers, 2001). The correlation and significance are that the adoptee, through this discrimination, like any other individual that fits within more than one marginalised group, for example a black lesbian woman, is more open and subject to myriad forms of discrimination and non-acceptance.

In some cases, participant Anna, Cathy, Sam, David, Pan and me, this increased vulnerability, rejection and non-acceptance was also the catalyst for sexual promiscuous behaviour. This promiscuous sexual behaviour was used to find acceptance/love through positive and/or negative sexual relationships. More than not the adoptee would 'put themselves' in potentially emotionally and psychologically harmful situations, through the act of sexual relations, to satisfy that need to feel accepted/loved. Which again, it could be posited that, the fundamental need to feel accepted and loved, is influenced and begins with the relinquishment by the birth mother (Barth et al., 2005; Brodzinsky, 2011; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Farr, Grant-Marsney & Grotevant, 2014; Harris, 2012; Javier et al., 2007; Lifton, 1979, 2007, 2009, 2010; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009). If this relinquishment is the fundamental beginning of vulnerability, with a desired need to search for love/acceptance; a possible link can be seen in the data, from the participants' sexual relations and sexuality being used as a means/vehicle to satisfy this fundamental need.

## **8.7 Implications for practice**

Mills (2003) alerts us:

*To prosper and advance, it becomes important for any discipline to evaluate its theoretical and methodological propositions from within its own evolving framework rather than insulate itself from criticism due to threat or cherished group loyalties (p. 150).*

Heisenberg (1959 cited in Riessman, 2008) also questions, '*What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.*' (p.183) Therefore for research and the implications for research it would seem that we could suggest that it is dependent on the questions we ask and how open to critique and evaluation we are (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Etherington, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; McLeod, 2010, 2011, 2013; West, 2001, 2011, 2013).

When looking at case material in counselling and psychotherapy research, McLeod (2010) presents several factors, and ways that research can be used and implemented within the counselling and psychotherapy profession. He refers to documenting and disseminating new approaches to therapy, a contribution to public awareness and understanding, drawing attention to critical issues and areas of practice, theory development, and implications for training (2010). If we relate this directly back to an ethical and professional responsibility (BACP, 2015, 2016, Bond, 2004, McLeod, 2010, 2011, 2013; West, 2002, 2013) in the counselling and psychotherapy profession, we see the concept and practice of research, and McLeod's (2010) factors, as a possible way to bring awareness to, enhance, benefit and develop practice for the profession as a whole. This again is supported by leading researchers and authors in the counselling and psychotherapy profession (Bond, 2004; Bower, 2010; Cartwright, 2007; Cooper, 2013; Cooper *et al.*, 2014; Dyer & Joseph, 2006; Etherington, 2003, 2004, 2007; McLeod, 2010, 2011, 2013; McLeod, Elliot & Wheeler, 2010; West, 2001, 2002, 2011, 2013).

For me, the overarching pragmatic question of any piece of research; is how does this research enhance the quality and practice for the people involved?

Clandinin (2013), from a narrative and pragmatist perspective, calls into question the practical and social justifications of research, highlighting and asking us as researchers, to question the pragmatic application of our research for theory, policy and practice. Riessman (2008), also from a narrative perspective, and Kinchloe and Berry (2004), from a Bricolage

perspective, similarly ask us to consider the practical and social aspects, whilst also highlighting the socio-political social-action and social-justice element from critical theory. Therefore, at the start of this research, I considered and questioned the practical and social justifications of this study; below is the extract from my research journal dated 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014:

***Practical Justification:*** how is my research going to inform practice? Looking at the adoption process and development of an adoptee's sexuality; relating this to their experience and needs as a developing adoptee within the family unit, school, their relationship to others, their potential support needs, and ways to create a holistic support network for the adoptee. Therefore, raising the question: Is there a need for specialist support around the adoptee's developing sexuality?

***Social Justifications:*** Will new theoretical insight come from this inquiry? Do adoptees experience the relinquishment by the birth mother as trauma? Do the adoptees experience certain moments in their lives, or development stages that affect developing sexuality and identity? Does the support and understanding of the adoption family determine and affect sexual identity and developing sexuality? How are these questions and experiences related to personality theories e.g. Rogers, 1959? If the above questions have an influence on developing sexuality and sexual identity, this could/will inform professional and supportive practice, as well as informing the social action needed to take to reassess the adoptee's development and support. This in turn could affect policies in respect to social work, placement of older children and adolescent, support professionals e.g. psychotherapists, and the practical needs of the adoptee.

Now at the end of my study, I ask, and make reference to these questions and considerations again. From the findings (see **chapter 4, 5, 6**), and the discussion (see **chapter 7**), it would suggest that an adoptee's sexuality and self-identity are vulnerable, due to the



fundamental vulnerability that arises from the relinquishment of the birth mother. Again, I acknowledge, that this is qualitative research, so no universal claims are to be made from it.

Touroni and Coyle (2002) argue that qualitative research seeks to produce in-depth analyses of a small group's accounts rather than representative samples. Therefore, they claim that, conclusions drawn are thus specific to that particular group and generalisations should be approached with caution. However, Touroni and Coyle (2002), also argue that qualitative research advances knowledge through a series of detailed, small-scale studies. Turner, Barlow and Ilberry (2002), McLeod (2010, 2011) and West (2001, 2011, 2013) likewise suggest that such methodologies achieve a specific and deep knowledge. This would propose then, that although this research is a small-scale study, consisting of eleven participants, it does have relevance and importance to the subject group under study.

Carradice, Shankland, and Beail, (2002) believe that the generalisability of findings in qualitative research is important and go so far as to argue that '*when considering a qualitative study, the research should be evaluated by applicability of the concepts to other situations and to others involved in the phenomenon*' (p. 25). Thus, confirming Clandinin's (2013) practical and social justifications, and my questions to this point at the start of this research.

If we relate this to IPA as a methodology (see **section 3.6**); the inductive nature of IPA allows authors to discuss their analysis in the light of varied existing psychological theories, models or approaches (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). For example, Flowers et al. (1997) and Flowers, Knussen, and Duncan (2001) use their analysis of sexuality in gay men, to highlight the inadequacies in psychological theories relating to HIV, sexual health and sexual health promotion. These studies show a clear link in how qualitative research can enhance and develop theory and practice for the group involved. If I relate the above to the aims of this research:

- ❖ To gain access to and gather adult adoptee's personal narratives/stories around the subject of their sexuality, their self-identity and their adoption;

- ❖ To give ‘voice’ to adult adoptees around the subject of sexuality and adoption;
- ❖ To represent and then present these narratives/stories honouring both the individual particulars of ‘lived experience’ and also to highlight any shared thematic qualities of the participants.

There is a potentially benefit and enhancement to professionals, policy, and organisations that work with this group. As insight into the area of adoptee sexuality, and how an adult adoptee understands their sexuality, and presents, can help professionals, individuals, families and the people involved with adoptees, better be informed. Therefore, if issues do arise, for example in the case of genetic sexual attraction (see **section 7.2**), an awareness and acknowledgement of this area can be taken seriously for all the people involved, and appropriate intervention, support and care can be gained and implemented.

Again, relating this to a pragmatic perspective, Kvale and Brinkman (2009) claim, *‘...in pragmatism...ideas and meanings derive their legitimacy from enabling us to cope with the world in which we find ourselves.’* (p.56) Taylor (1985), and Clandinin (2013) also emphasising the pragmatist point, declare that social theory is a practical application of human action through the meanings and interpretations humans apply to their existence. If we take these points further we begin to understand and see that the objects of human and social science are embedded, and therefore constituted by the very actions and relationships that organise the social world. Therefore, the relationships and everyday living of individuals and groups constitute a reality, and a way to ‘navigate’ that reality.

When relating this to moral implications for practice, the ethical and political dimensions are again quickly highlighted, as the constituted reality of individuals and groups and the ‘reality’ of their ‘truth’ claims can be acknowledged, understood and given socio-political awareness, for the enhancement of the groups involved. This is evident in research that incorporates and works with minority groups and disenfranchised groups, to develop social awareness and improve their psychological and socio-political wellbeing (Brodzinsky,

2011; Chu & Bowman, 2002; Flowers *et al.*, 1997; Flowers, Knussen, & Duncan, 2001; Grant-Marsney, Grotevant, & Sayer, 2015; Plummer, 1981; Tourin & Coyle, 2002; Walker, Hernandez & Davey, 2010; Zaccagnino *et al.*, 2015).

Therefore this Ph.D. study is a contribution to the subject area of adoption sexuality through the voices of adult adoptees. Through this research I have offered narratives and findings to help others *better* understand and comprehend sexuality from the perspective of adoption, and to add to this somewhat sparsely researched arena. In section 7.6.1 attachment styles and theory was questioned in relation to the adoptee's self-formation and sexuality, highlighting the need for practitioner awareness of the vulnerable nature of the adoptee, due to a predisposed insecure attachment style, through the relinquishment of the adoptee by the birth mother, and how the adoptee is supported, or not, through their self-development. Sections 7.6.2 and 7.6.3 raised concerns regarding the adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' and how oppressive and authoritarian practices could potentially harm the adoptee's continued psycho-social development, which has implications for informing social policy, and policymakers, as to how they could implement the new knowledge gained from these research findings to better implement therapeutic intervention and social policy to support the adoptee, especially through the pre-adult development stages, e.g. teenage years. Section 7.6.4 draws awareness to the wider social world and how western gender stereotyping can negatively influence the adoptee's sexuality and self-formation. Finally, section 7.7 links the ethical, political and social influences when considering working with an adoptee from within a 'helping/therapeutic relationship'.

From a counselling and psychotherapeutic viewpoint, I hope this research will widen the knowledge base for those that therapeutically work with adoptees, and help to inform them around this subject of adoptees' sexuality, and the vulnerable nature of this, in relation to insecure attachment styles, their self-development and sexual identity, relative to the areas that I have highlighted above and discussed in chapter 7, and section 8.3. The intention of

this Ph.D. thesis is to take the exploration of sexuality within the field of adoption one step further. Again, this has implications for both the practice and training of counsellors and psychotherapists, and other health care professionals that work within adoption; creating and promoting awareness of adoptees' sexuality.

## **8.8 Reflections & Reflexivity on the Study**

### **Losses & Gains**

Most people 'in general' lose their parents when their parents have reached an older age than themselves. In a recent report by the PHE (Public Health England) (2016), the life expectancy of UK residents has been at its highest, with men now living into their 80's and women living into their 90's. Therefore, most people usually experience loss of a parent when they reach their life expectancy. For the adoptee, this isn't the case; we lost our parents the moment we were born, not necessarily to death, but as good as, and in some cases even worse. The thought of knowing they are alive, yet you are unable to find them, can be an unresolved eternal suffering in itself.

For me, I experienced the loss of my birth mother twice. The first time when I was relinquished and 'put up' for adoption, and the second time, at the start of my research in 2014, when my birth mother died from alcoholism. We had been in sporadic contact since I was eighteen. To say I was devastated was/is an understatement. In fact, I can't even find the words or vocabulary to express my experience of losing mum...

So how then do we communicate and understand human experience and condition? How do we make sense of an experience of losing your birth family? One possibility, and one that I have used within this thesis, is through the structuring and telling of a person's narrative.

## The Analysis

Regarding the analytical process; although a pleasure and honour to hear and share in the participant's narrative. The analytical process was far from a 'walk in the park' so to speak. The pain of the analysis was intense.

An extract from my research journal 18<sup>th</sup> June 2015:

*The constant pain, as I listen over and over again, to the stories of each participant was profound. Each participant is different, yet they share the pain, or I hear the pain. Is it their pain, or my pain, or shared pain? I hear repeatedly the pain of the loss of the mother. The pain of not knowing. The pain of not understanding. The pain of not belonging. Mismatched, misplaced, unheard, forgotten, the sadness of looking back, of not really belonging, of not being connected.*

*I struggle with hearing this pain. I struggle with feeling my own pain as I remember, as I feel those same pains, those hurts, those memories, those wants, those desires, that feeling of needing to belong to be loved and accepted.*

*Each one speaks from their pain, each one speaks, laughs, justifies and makes light of the pain they suffer, of the pain and hurt they experienced. It hurts me to listen to these recordings. It hurts me to identify, to connect, to bond with these fellow adoptees. There is a shared understanding in our misplacement, in our sense of needing to belong, to be accepted and loved for just being ourselves. Our identities, forged from our experiences, our adoptive families, birth families (if in contact or not) and the people we have interacted with throughout our lives. Identities that we have created, yet somehow fit to certain cultural images...within the cultures that we live and exist. Always conforming, and yet not, the social chameleons that we are, fitting into our situations until it's time to move on and change. Taking the path of least resistance when we feel we may not be accepted, to fit in, to be liked, to be loved, to be accepted as ok!*

Looking back on this process, through the reflexive turn, highlighted how difficult and painful the analysis process was. Although not all of the thesis, the analysis and the underpinning heuristic process definitely emphasised the painful experience of listening and

analysing my own, and the participants' data. This once again - also reflective of therapy - shows the intensity and experience that can be involved when listening and sharing in another's life story/narrative.

A significant aspect of the thesis that was also highlighted throughout the research journey which links to the analysis and narratives, and one that I feel passionately about, is the need to allow time and space for adoptees (especially young adoptees) to voice and be heard. From an ethical standpoint on historic narratives, Ricoeur (1988) has this to say, '*There are perhaps crimes that must not be forgotten, victims whose suffering cries less for vengeance than for narration. The will not to forget alone can prevent these crimes from ever occurring again*'. Although commenting on the tragedies and atrocities of war; Ricoeur still reminds us not to forget the need of people and groups to be heard. He advocates a space and platform for their experiences to be validated and understood, with the overarching message for us all to learn from these experiences for the amelioration for all involved.

## **Adoptive parents**

A conclusive note: given the adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' the responsibility of the adoptive parents is tantamount to the development of adoptees' feelings of belonging and the capacity for the adoptee to create a sense of self. The fear to not speak out leads to silencing and non-narration of one's life, interests, ideas, relationships, and sense of 'who' one is. This can be either through the process of not-speaking, or the process of confrontational speech, either way leads to unsatisfactory and incoherent narratives that limit the adoptee's ability to create a coherent genuine sense of self. The compromising of the adoptee's voice and ability to story their lives through relational interaction with the parents also can create insecurities. Therefore, the adoptee does not feel secure enough to share or story their self/identity with the parents. This is affected and limited even more if the adoptee does not have access to the birth parent's narratives, as their potential to story and create a

self will be incomplete and/or restricted. This in turn can lead to behavioural issues and psychological/emotional distress and anxiousness from a fragmented or fractured self (Barth et al., 2005; Brodzinsky, 2011; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990; Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Farr, Grant-Marsney & Grotevant, 2014; Harris, 2012; Javier et al., 2007; Lifton, 1979, 2007, 2009, 2010; Schofield & Beek, 2006; Verrier, 2009).

I know what it feels like to be an adoptee, and how my fellow adoptees feel also, and what the data and literature present. Therefore, I do not take lightly the adoptive parents' role and the huge responsibility that they 'take on' with an adoptee. In some respects, the adoptive parents' role is harder and a lot more challenging than the non-adoptive parent, this is more than evident through the adoption literature and research, and also this thesis. I have the utmost respect and admiration for any person that decides to adopt a child/person. All I ask and I ask this with due care and attention; is that you fully explore and understand your reasons for doing this, and work to resolve any of your own issues that could potentially harm/damage the adoptee's ability to be heard, respected and understood. I advocate ongoing training and support for adoptive parents, especially around the adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability', and how this can impact on their developing self-formation and sexuality throughout an adoptee's life.

## **8.9 Summary**

In this chapter, the limitations of the research have been presented and discussed. I highlighted the originality of the research looking at adoptee's sexuality and self-formation, challenging attachment theory and styles, presenting my concept of the adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability', and the socio-political implications of this for an adoptee.

Areas for further research were also highlighted, and I looked at answering the research question through the relationship between adoption and sexuality, and the links that

became apparent through the research and data findings. Suggestions, based on and from the research, have been presented regarding implications for practice, which demonstrated the need for non-oppressive, egalitarian practice to facilitate and help counter the adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability'.

The final concluding aspects of the study being from my personal reflections and reflexivity on the study, this focused on a need for the adoptive parents to receive ongoing support and training, to help facilitate the possible issues/concerns that the adoptee's 'inherent potential toward vulnerability' may cause throughout their lives.



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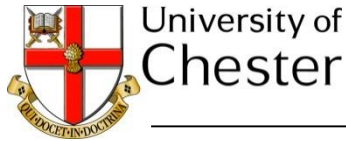
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## Appendix 1.



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### Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

#### Research Title

An inquiry into adult adoptees' journeying with their sexuality.

#### Background

I am studying for a PhD at Chester University. As a fellow adult adoptee who has questioned their sexuality over the past 40 years, my interest in this topic stems from my personal participation and history in this research.

There has not been any research that I could find, as yet, that makes any direct links between the subject of adoption and one's developing, or developed, sexuality. My aim is to explore and gather adult adoptee's personal narratives/stories around the subject of their sexuality, how they perceive themselves, and their adoptive process. I would like to enable their voices to be heard, and increase understanding amongst health professionals and people in general who may come in contact and /or work with this group.

#### Invitation

I am inviting each participant to tell their story about how they see themselves and understand their sexuality.

I have presented five questions below to assist and to act as a guide:

1. *How do you understand your sexuality?*
2. *What does your sexuality mean to you?*
3. *Is your self-identity connected to your sexuality?*

4. *Do you see any correlation between being adopted and your sexuality?*
5. *Is there anything else you might want to say? Possibly about your adoptive process.*

If you take part, I will invite you to consider the above questions in relation to how you perceive your sexuality and particularly how you have experienced your sexuality over the process of your life. There may be other questions not on the list that are important to you and I would like to hear about those too.

### **Am I eligible to take part?**

Participants should meet the following criteria:

- Be an Adult (over the age of 25 years) and has been adopted.
- Be of any gender orientation or identity.
- Be fluent in written and verbal English.
- Feel sufficiently grounded in their experience to be able to participate safely.

### **What will happen?**

If after reading this information sheet you are interested in taking part, the next step is to complete and return the attached Inclusion Checklist. Once I have received the checklist, I will then contact you by telephone to arrange a mutually convenient time and place to meet.

You will be asked to provide your written consent before the interview begins.

When we meet I will invite you to explore your experiences; this will take the form of a digitally recorded interview lasting no more than an hour and a half.

After the interview, I will transcribe the recording, and you will be offered the opportunity to check this for accuracy. Once my analysis is complete you will also be able to read the results if you wish.

### **What are the potential advantages of taking part?**

You may value the opportunity to tell your story. By taking part, you will be contributing to increasing awareness of this under-researched topic.

### **What are the potential disadvantages of taking part?**

There is a risk that talking about this sensitive topic may bring up painful feelings for you. I will provide you with a list of BACP accredited counsellors in your local area, should you wish to explore the subject further.

### **Participants' rights**

Your participation in the study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point before data analysis has begun, without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

You will be offered the opportunity to read and agree the transcript of your interview, and at that point will be giving consent for the data to be used in the study.

Once final consent has been given and the dissertation writing-up has begun, you will not be able to withdraw or change the material, as the data will have been added into the group data set, and it will no longer be possible to isolate it. I will write to you when this process begins to inform you of when your right to withdraw has ceased.

There will be no special compensation arrangements if an individual is harmed by taking part in the study.

### **Confidentiality**

The interview will take place in an environment where privacy can be ensured.

I will give you a pseudonym, which I will use throughout the research to protect your anonymity. Anonymised verbatim quotes may be used in the final dissertation but I will ensure that I only use material that will not identify participants.

The transcripts and related data will be securely stored for a period of five years, by me, and then destroyed.

### **What will happen to the results?**

The results of the research will be part of my PhD thesis which will be submitted to Chester University. The thesis will be available in the Department of Social and Political Science and also may be available electronically.

Quotes from the transcript may also be included in subsequent papers put forward for publication, or presented at conferences

### **What if I am unhappy with the process?**

If you are unhappy with any aspect of the process, I would ask you to contact me, Michael Sims, in the first instance: 1427479@chester.ac.uk

If the outcome is not satisfactory, you can contact my Research Supervisor, Dr Peter Gubi: [p.gubi@chester.ac.uk](mailto:p.gubi@chester.ac.uk)

If the issue still cannot be resolved, please contact the Dean of Social Sciences, David Balsamo: d.balsamo@chester.ac.uk

### **Any questions?**

Please feel free to contact me via email with any queries: 1427479@chester.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in this study.

## Appendix 2.



### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM (Interview)

**Title of Study:** An inquiry into adult adoptees' journeying with their sexuality.

**Name of Researcher:** Michael Sims

**Name of Participant:**.....

**If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.**

**Please  
Initial  
Box**

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, up until the writing-up of the dissertation has begun, without giving a reason and without detriment to myself.

3. I understand that after reading and agreeing the transcript of my interview, and giving my written consent, that my data can be used in the analysis.

4. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded.

5. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

6. I agree that any anonymised data may be used in future publications.

7. I understand that whilst every effort will be made to protect my anonymity, this could be affected by

**whatever I have already shared (or subsequently share) through the adoption forum.**

**I agree to take part in the above project**

.....	.....	.....
<b>Name of participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

.....	.....	.....
<b>Name of Person taking Consent</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

## Appendix 3.

Participants' Themes									
Cathy's Themes	David's Themes	Eva's Themes	Noel's Themes	Kim's Themes	Anna's Themes	Marty's Themes	Pan's Themes	Vox's Themes	Sam's Themes
<b>Sexual attitude</b> Body is sex Sex is wrong Excitement in sex Body dormant – sexuality dormant Sex must equal genuine love Using sex to gain love/intimacy Is sex - love?	<b>Play</b> A socially justifiable environment to play games Using sex for intimacy/connection Play the little boy Imaginative world Sexuality is a game - a story to play My rules - play the master/controller	<b>Sexual uncertainty</b> Sexuality is not fixed Bisexuality Social affects the natural Sexuality scale Hard to pin it down Don't pigeon hole me  <b>Feminine stereotypes</b> Mum is me Be a good mum Nurturing feminine Caring nature	<b>Fear of the Other</b> Abusive behaviour Fear of authority - being ruled by the other Tyrannical father – abuse of power Hetero-normativity – fear of other sexual orientation Abiding by rules	<b>What's my part?</b> The activist - fighting for the underdog Play the role Image informs the role If I'm helpful they'll need me - be useful Dreaming – daydreaming Creating fantasy	<b>Need for Love</b> Connecting to an inner self-love Realisation of using sex for love Love is More than physical - Love is More than image Driving need to connect Exhibitionism Looking for deeper emotional connection	<b>Searching for the feminine- Older Woman</b> Older Woman Attraction Cut off from women Maturity is Sex - Elusive women Idolatry of the Lost Mother – Divine Feminine Initiation Rite – to reclaim and move beyond the immature masculine to embrace the Feminine	<b>Sexual divisions</b> Stand against gender roles Heterosexuality is only acceptable Experimenting with Self Cultural exposure to culturally acceptable sexual images Homophobia Playing the straight role Choosing sexuality	<b>Sexually Unwavering</b> really clear about his identity and sexuality I've always known I was gay Innate unquestioning Trust my sexual body	<b>Passionate Drives</b> <i>Sexual drive is high</i> <i>Fiery to engulf</i> <i>Need for a woman</i> <i>Connecting to the body</i> <i>Sexual drive is part of me - my identity</i> <i>Strong sexual energy</i>
<b>Finding me</b> Where's the core of me? Elusive me Unconnected – not part of me - un-owned Struggle to be me Block to self – to sexuality Finding me in birth family/mother/father Fear stops me – suppresses my sexuality - who I am	<b>Distance</b> Staying hidden from fear of rejection Fear of contamination Others can hurt me – relationships are bad Justification to detach and stay distant from women & relationships Sexual not emotional	<b>What did I do?</b> Lonely childhood All needs were rejected Need for a mother Punishment for being me		<b>What's sex got to do with it?</b> Heterosexual attraction Sexuality is not all of me Need to be loved - need to be seen Intimacy - more than sex	<b>Sense of Self</b> Sense of me in my family ties Birth name signifies a sense of Self Finding Self in own children Need to be unique - to stand out Likes sexual self - sexual self is ok	<b>Self-stigmatising</b> Corrupting – perverting Wrongness – shame Deep well of pain Self-disgust Immature artist Culturally unaccepting Self-attacking	<b>Fear of being Seen</b> Fitting in for comfort – safety Social chameleon Adaptable Self to fit Controlling one's environment – relational encounters Playing the sexual stereotype Fear of being found out	<b>Pain of me</b> Sadness Unheard Unconfident – low esteem So much anger Mentions Primal wound	<b>Investigator</b> <i>Searching for answers</i> <i>Job as investigator</i> <i>Must keep searching for her</i> <i>Investigation into Self</i> <i>Searching for Self</i> <i>Looking externally for answers</i>
					<b>Fragile Me</b> Fragile inner Self Desperation Love denied from mother - Safer with men Rejection is torture Directing pain away from Self - Self-protection Fear of being alone	<b>Body Speaking</b> Ruptured too Soon Body remembering the separation Energetic Drive to Create – Complete Embodied loss Orgasmic – gratification			<b>Vulnerable Self</b> <i>Self-blame - Lack of trust</i> <i>Vulnerable me gives me access to the feminine world</i> <i>Identity bound with vulnerability</i> <i>Fear of losing vulnerable Self</i> <i>Lonely inside</i>

## Appendix 4.

**Table 15. Summary of the Superordinate and subordinate themes with participant quotes**

### ***Sexual Attitudes***

#### **Using sex to meet a need**

Cathy: I didn't have any problems with having sex with people because I was seeking acceptance and sex was one way to get it.

David: I never wanted people to get hurt, even though I did hurt people. I've never been malicious in that sense just cold for my own agenda.

Eva: I think it plays a big part in my relationships, yeah even with other people, especially with my gay friends.

Anna: I felt like they would love me forever because I had had sex with them.

Marty: Sexual relationships with an older woman, where there was something about the child in that for me.

Sam: To me it's about romance and love not just about sex.

Pan: Getting that attention that's what was really important to me. Having and been able to draw attention and focus it on myself.

#### **Sexual attraction**

Cathy: I thought maybe for a while that I wasn't really making it work with men because I was more interested in women.

David: I love women, you know. I like their company but there's always an element of sex or no sex.

Eva: I'm attracted to women. But am I a lesbian, I don't know.

Noel: I have been a pretty normal sort of guy, so they say, you know heterosexual-wise.



Kim: I don't think I've ever particularly struggled or wondered. So, I don't think there was any kind of I wonder if I'm actually a lesbian or not.

Anna: I've never actually classed myself as completely heterosexual. I've had dalliances in the past with females.

Marty: I always had a strong sexual attraction to older women.

Pan: If I was to say how I am physically aroused. I'm more aroused my women.

Vox: From high school on it was pretty clear I was attracted to guys.

Sam: Some have described me as very sexual. Not sure if that's good or bad. I am heterosexual, just attraction for women.

### **The Body**

Cathy: It's not kind of completely disappeared of the face of the earth but you know yeah it probably is as dormant as my sexuality.

David: I'm attracted to somebody who's got lovely breasts and curvy body – she's female, but strip all that away, it doesn't really make that much difference. It doesn't last, that's just the physicality.

Marty: That sort of sexual drive at that age I was 18 and was perhaps my body's way of saying well this is the only way...

Sam: It's not just your body is it? It's everything about it. Fortunately, there are things you can take now; there weren't when I was younger.

### **Sexual Wants**

Cathy: I have thought about how I would love to go to one of those festivals where everyone is naked and just embracing their bodies and sexuality.

David: Sometimes you might feel guilty just going in there for a quick shag you know. Is that wrong?

Eva: I thought I was bisexual but I never did anything about it with a woman at that point. It wasn't until my early twenties really.

Anna: When I was younger I kind of looked for that all the time constantly with everybody. I needed that attention.

Marty: To be honest right from the age of 17 / 18 I felt sexually attracted to older women.

Sam: My sexuality is... I'm very, it's more of a different sort of person, it's still very sensitive but it's much more passionate for women.

### ***Vulnerability***

#### **Self as vulnerable**

Cathy: It gives me that clear distinction between what my life is mostly like, which involves being in an anxious state.

David: I just take it day by day and just sort of go, I want to be loved.

Eva: I just shut everything down, emotions, feelings, everything because they were not being met, but they were also getting punished too.

Noel: I was ready to commit suicide, almost. I didn't quite get to that stage but I did hit the bottom.

Kim: I think people would be surprised because I am very intense. I come across as very outgoing. So, I think they would be surprised, if they knew that side of me.

Anna: I'm scared, too scared to ask them and contact her because I don't want that rejection.

Marty: You look outside of yourself and it can't see anyone else doing it, so it must be me; there must be something wrong with me.

Pan: They are the times I begin to get a bit more unsure about how I'm behaving, and how I feel, and is it time for a change.

Vox: To this day I struggle with low self-esteem and sense of purpose.

Sam: I've got the scars to prove it, but I still have that sensitive side to me, and I don't want to lose that it's part of who I am.

### **Influential fear/stresses**

Cathy: I went through a phase of thinking my fear of having a relationship with a woman was because I would disappoint my adoptive father.

David: I wouldn't do anything to jeopardise what we've got in that sense, as much as my imagination would tempt me.

Eva: Everything was shut down, and I was in a bubble really. My teenage years were quite traumatised really.

Noel: You lived in fear of 6 o'clock coming when you knew your dad would walk in the door.

Kim: I lose my temper with the kids when they're not doing something that I worry about – I always project into the future.

Anna: I've made a conscious effort to move away from anybody that's not a good influence or part of my life.

Marty: When they start talking about not having sex but anything in that area. I'm kind of, oh my god, I'm getting anxious - I'm uncomfortable.

Pan: I attribute this to a fear; a pretty basic fear of rejection, which I think is understandable in an adoptee.

Sam: I mean I'd go the other extreme and fight to protect it, I'd literally fight, I know that's not very sensitive but I would.

### **Hiding**

Cathy: I have really understood in the last decade how much of myself I just don't understand - how many memories I hold, how my behaviours are a form of communication and what is really going on at the subconscious level.

David: You don't always give your true self over, getting back to this, how can I adjust myself? How can I camouflage what somebody might not want to see, in order to be liked...

Noel: That's how I dealt with it, I've just pushed it away and said well what you don't see, you don't know.

Kim: Like, secretive in a way, you know, just not ever being able to say what I was doing or where I was going and that kind of thing because they didn't like the people I was with.

Marty: I remember once years ago a colleague said to me, I was saying I kind of fancied someone or something, and they said, 'really I was convinced you are someone who was a-sexual. You're a 'something' but you don't have a sexuality.' And I just thought wow you know, oh god if only you knew.

Pan: It's easy to guard against it by not exposing yourself.

Sam: The sexuality was, it has caused problems sometimes. I've felt very vulnerable, unable to hide sexually and I don't know if that's to do with the adoption and it's exposing me completely as a person.

### **My pain**

Cathy: There is also something wrapped up in there about fear of not being good enough – that there is something wrong with me. I feel I project this sense of being flawed (a reject) on to my physique and you know I feel quite vulnerable about that.

David: I'm a one-off. I don't mean that to be any sort of something special but I didn't fit.

Eva: I can forgive them for that but as you can gather I'm not in contact with them.

Noel: Birth mother was totally against it and she almost, from what I understand, she almost held my aunt to ransom to say if you have anything more to do with him, I will cut you out, so unfortunately that was how the double jeopardy came in then.

Kim: I suppose it's accepting that life isn't necessarily like that. It isn't perfect.

Anna: Constantly looking for that love and attention because it feels like it was taken away from you from an early age as babies.

Marty: The anger I had lots of people say that you're really angry with your mum. And I'm like no I'm not. But really, I kind of got to see that I am.

Pan: A deep well of pain that has, you know, anger is its language of expression for want of a better channel.

Vox: I grew up disconnected from my true self.

Sam: My dad was one-person coz we grew up in an apartment and there was one person very much to the public, and he could be slightly different, I took the brunt of it really.

### ***The 'Other'***

#### **The Cultural 'Other'**

Cathy: All the cultural aspects of what is involved with being a woman - all that is rammed down our throats through the magazines and TV.

David: Going around the world, all those things and all those people that I met, you know it has been very, very wealthy culturally.

Eva: When I'm out and I'm talking to people I don't say my partner I say my girlfriend.

Noel: The local Quakers want to come and knock on my door and chat to me, up to them, but don't push it in my face or I'll shut the door on you.

Kim: You weren't allowed to have any piercings, so you kind of go into that, don't you? And you become this – I guess you are influenced by people around you.

Anna: I feel very suppressed... and kind of happier at home...so I don't want to be around other people where I can't be me.

Marty: Mrs Robinson type...we had a relationship for a while...I think there were times when out in public that I would be uncomfortable.

Pan: When I was teenager no one ever passed around pictures of naked men. I'd go to the butchers on my way to school every morning to get a pie for my lunch and once a week he'd give us a cd full of porn. So, a lot of that was cultural exposure.

Vox: For me the adoption process was built on lies, half-truths and secrets and asks the adoptee to accept unanswered questions.

Sam: Being illegitimate that meant you were seen as second class, almost like second hand goods, from a second-hand store.

### **Familial undercurrents**

Cathy: My parents would say things like we don't understand your behavior and I would go away and think well I don't either.

David: I think there's something that you hanker for which to a degree is normality or a normal relationship with your mother or your father.

Eva: When my eldest was grown and went off to Uni, the marriage had sort of been on and off, so at that point there was a big gap in my life.

Noel: You didn't love your kids the way I'd been brought up, because there's nobody at school that teaches you how to bring kids up.

Kim: They are my Mum and Dad and part of me would feel bad looking into my biological parents because I'd feel bad for them.

Anna: I was the black sheep of the family, always the wild child, so is that because I was adopted or because that I'm like my birth parents.

Marty: I think there was an incredible pressure to be a good boy. I wasn't always a good boy. I was mysterious I was a bad kid. They're didn't like the mystery very much... pressure even now, there is an incredible pressure to be a good boy.

Pan: A lot of my family are Irish as well, there's a lot of pressure there to be whoever I am but also be straight.

Vox: I would say I had a very micromanaging controlling adoptive mother, very insecure and my dad was very passive.

Sam: I'm drawn more to a female environment, I've got two daughters, 4 nieces, loads of female cousins, so I've always felt more comfortable, and I feel like myself when I'm talking to women.

### **Social pressure**

Cathy: Our self-worth and self-esteem are very wrapped up with society's ideals as conveyed through the media and if you do no conform you are more likely to get rejected.

Eva: I think my upbringing had a lot to do with that I was never allowed to be myself.

Kim: Sometimes I do sort of look at the past and go, Oh, I don't want to conform that much!

Marty: It is very hard for people to really understand and it's not for want of trying. Friends and family and others in that they do not really understand and know what that feels like as an adoptee.

Pan: It's the part I present to them because it's how I feel right. It's how I understand how to make a woman comfortable.

### **Connecting**

Cathy: It was overwhelming for me to realise how important these people were to me and how being separated from them had been so incredibly painful and how alone I had felt.

David: I class myself as being very lucky to have a handful of friends – maybe four, three or four, three perhaps that I would go to if there was anything major, yes, so quite lucky in that respect.

Eva: The desire to have something of my own and my own family overrode everything.

Noel: I thought, no I don't really look like her but then there are certain little things, like I've got this little fat bit on the end of my nose – she's got it.

Kim: I always felt that my friends had very open discussions with their mums – I mean I am very open with my daughter and with my son as well. Now I just wonder whether if you actually give birth to someone, you are, you want to impart all of this.

Anna: The friends that I have, I kind of have real special bonds with them. I've formed a family with friends.

Vox: I am an advocate for open adoptions and the right to know and have access to our birth families.

Sam: There was a lot of religious bigotry in the police, so he obviously had a lot about him and that's quite a nice thing to find that link to him, I like that.

### ***The Feminine***

#### **Mother**

Cathy: My mum had been searching for me since I was 11 and had been waiting since I was 18 for me to turn up.



David: I never called her Mum until five or six years ago when she was. I mean, she died and sort of like, she'd always been my mum really.

Eva: I suppose I will always yearn for a mother to be there for me. But I know that's not going to happen and it's not going to happen with her.

Noel: It was a double rejection from your mother, not only did she have the first one where she had no choice which you could accept, but then when she has got a choice, she still rejects.

Kim: She was a single mother, and I know she was very young from Liverpool.

Anna: That's how I feel about my birth name. I think maybe on some level it gives me a connection back to my birth mum.

Marty: I'm unconsciously still putting my birthmother up on a bit of a pedestal and that no one else can match that standard.

Pan: We spoke for two/three hours and when she left she had a wee cry and I kind of felt like something weird. It really took me a few weeks to start connecting on an emotional level.

Sam: My birth mother, she's dead now but I'm very close to my birth sister who wasn't adopted.

### **Searching**

David: I think it was just that I saw, I went with somebody, and it's not right, and then met somebody else and went on.

Eva: Lots of people were shocked when I left my husband and I said I was dating women.

Kim: I will look into it, go onto the Internet and I know you have to do this and then apparently you have to have counselling – Oh God.

Anna: I would love to see my birth parents just to see if I am like them, and to see if my mannerisms are from my birth parents.

Marty: Dreams as a young child about a woman, and not knowing who that was, it wasn't anyone I knew in my daily life, you know who was present in the dreams in having an allure or some kind of pull towards me.

Vox: My adoption was a closed adoption I did not know and could not know who my birthparents were due to the laws.

Sam: I still think because I was adopted I wanted to search; I was trying to search for something much deeper.

### **Iconic**

David: It might just be aesthetic yes, I mean you can appreciate, you know a person that you are talking to, through whatever aspects, you know and an admiration.

Kim: I'm not 100% sure but I know really you don't forget having a baby do you?

Anna: I believe when you become a mother, your love is directed toward the child.

Marty: The older woman, if the older woman, is an icon like the mother.

### **Stereotypes**

Cathy: What it means to be a woman, what our roles are and what is sexy. The objectification is an added dimension to that challenge.

David: Emotional closeness, I've been there, but I think that's where maybe the female nurture or the female psyche is different.

Eva: I was very mumsy...that was my main goal. I wanted to be a good mum.

Anna: The males that I'm friendly with are very honest; they won't kind of beat-around-the-bush. They don't judge me. Whereas I do have female friends, and erm, you know?

Marty: Feminine is in my world-view of my experience, this beautiful nurturing all-encompassing energy.